



Security Council

Seventy-eighth year

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Tuesday, 16 May 2023, 10 a.m.

New York

Provisional

President: Mrs. Baeriswyl (Switzerland)

Members:

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| Albania | Ms. Dautllari |
| Brazil | Mr. De Almeida Filho |
| China | Mr. Dai Bing |
| Ecuador | Mr. Montalvo Sosa |
| France | Mr. De Rivière |
| Gabon | Mr. Biang |
| Ghana | Mr. Agyeman |
| Japan | Mr. Ishikane |
| Malta | Ms. Gatt |
| Mozambique | Mr. Afonso |
| Russian Federation | Ms. Evstigneeva |
| United Arab Emirates | Mrs. Alhefeiti |
| United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . . | Mr. Kariuki |
| United States of America | Mr. DeLaurentis |

Agenda

Peace and security in Africa

Report of the Secretary-General on the operationalization of the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel (S/2023/328)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Peace and security in Africa

Report of the Secretary-General on the operationalization of the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel (S/2023/328)

The President (*spoke in French*): In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Ms. Martha Ama Akyaa Pobee, Assistant Secretary-General for Africa in the Departments of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and Peace Operations; Mr. Eric Tiaré, Executive Secretary of the Group of Five for the Sahel; and Ms. Aïssatou Diouf of Enda Energy, Coordinator of the Climate Action Network for West and Central Africa.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2023/328, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel.

I now give the floor to Ms. Pobee.

Ms. Pobee: I thank you, Madam, for giving me the opportunity to address the Security Council.

Since I last briefed the Security Council on the Group of Five for the Sahel (G-5 Sahel) (see S/PV.9194), the security situation in the region has remained very worrisome. Non-State armed groups continue to carry out large-scale attacks against civilian and military targets and to engage in confrontations over access to resources, territorial control and influence. Terrorists and violent extremist groups frequently target border areas, in particular the tri-border area of Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger — the Liptako-Gourma. In that regard, we also observed an upsurge in clashes between the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara and Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin earlier this year. The security crisis is exacerbating an already dire humanitarian situation. In Burkina Faso, there are growing humanitarian challenges as a result of the violence, with roughly 4.7 million people in need of humanitarian assistance and more than 2 million

people displaced internally this year, compared to the 3.5 million people who needed humanitarian assistance in 2022. In Mali, a staggering 8.8 million people will need humanitarian assistance this year, compared to 7.5 million people who required such assistance in 2022. Women and children still bear the brunt of the violence and the food insecurity.

The G-5 Sahel Joint Force has made steady progress in its operationalization. Joint Force units have gained practical experience and developed enhanced efficiency in their operations, particularly in the areas of coordination and responsiveness. Against the background of strategic and operational shifts in the Sahel, including the reconfiguration of the European and French forces, and also in the context of Mali's withdrawal from the G-5 Sahel and the intensification of threats in the border area, the Joint Force is restructuring in response to those new realities. Although the reconfiguration of the Joint Force has resulted in the cessation of major military operations since January, G-5 Sahel member States seem determined to strengthen intraregional cooperation, including by establishing bilateral and multilateral cooperation mechanisms with the Malian armed forces in the fight against terrorism, as demonstrated by the recent strengthening of bilateral military cooperation between Mali and Burkina Faso and between Mali and the Niger.

However, despite those efforts, insecurity in the tri-border area continues to grow. The tripartite agreement between the European Union, the G-5 Sahel and the United Nations is expected to end in June. I wish to warmly thank the European Union for its invaluable support under that agreement, which provided funding for the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) to deliver life-support consumables to the Joint Force. With the expiration of the tripartite agreement, MINUSMA's logistical and operational support to the Joint Force, as part of its mandate, will cease to be in effect.

MINUSMA has spared no effort in providing operational and logistic support to the Joint Force whenever it was requested, in accordance with its mandate to support the Joint Force. That included fuel, rations, medical evacuation and engineering support such as building camps. In total, MINUSMA has provided more than 275,000 individual ration packs and 83,000 litres of lubricants and 6 million litres of fuel. That support helped to fill critical gaps hindering the mobility and operational tempo of the Joint Force.

Unfortunately, the international community's efforts have fallen short of what is required to render the Joint Force fully operational and autonomous, with the capacity to help stabilize the Sahel region. A lack of consensus among partners and donors on the most effective support mechanism for the Joint Force has proved a significant obstacle to its operationalization. The admittedly limited support provided by MINUSMA to the Joint Force did not fundamentally change the situation.

Be that as it may, the end of the tripartite agreement among the European Union, the G-5 Sahel and the United Nations presents an opportunity to reflect on how the international community should renew its approaches to supporting regional security mechanisms. The upcoming deliberations in the Council later this month, on the Secretary-General's report on the implementation of resolutions 2320 (2016) and 2378 (2017) and considerations related to the financing of African Union peace support operations mandated by the Security Council, will undoubtedly provide a timely opportunity for the Council to consider the issue.

Through the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the United Nations has pursued its support to the Joint Force in operationalizing its international human rights and humanitarian law compliance framework. Important institutional, legal and behavioural progress and changes have been recorded. Notably, the Joint Force currently has an internal mechanism that enables it to attribute responsibility for incidents, analyse patterns, take necessary remedial action and adapt its operational conduct. Looking ahead, continued human rights work with regional and national security actors in the Sahel will remain critical in the context of the deteriorating security situation. Indeed, the G-5 Sahel countries must ensure that their military strategies to counter terrorism and violent extremism are fully anchored in respect for human rights and place the protection of every population at their core. That is necessary if the desired results are to be achieved.

In that context, the political and operational support of partners remains essential to the stabilization of Mali and the Sahel. It is urgent to address the challenges faced by the Sahel in a sustainable and effective manner and support national actors in their efforts to implement the initiatives that they themselves have devised. Multifaceted support will prevent the crisis in the Sahel from upsetting the fragile political balances

in the region, and will help prevent further spillover of insecurity into the coastal countries. For its part, the United Nations stands ready to further support the efforts of the G-5 Sahel, including through capacity-building support in areas such as the prevention of violent extremism and radicalization and the promotion of the rule of law and border-security management.

Regardless of the support extended to the G-5 Sahel, stabilizing the region hinges on aligning our policies and approaches and putting the people of the region at the forefront of our efforts. The United Nations is committed to working with all partners to ensure that governance structures are more democratic and open and that the people of the Sahel have more confidence in their institutions. If we are to achieve durable peace in the region, we must address its underlying governance, development, human rights and humanitarian challenges. It was in that spirit that the African Union, the Economic Community of West African States, the G-5 Sahel and the United Nations established the Independent High-Level Panel on Security and Development in the Sahel. Under the leadership of Mahamadou Issoufou, the former President of the Niger, the Panel is actively working to help us reshape our approaches in the region and maximize our collective impact through innovative, coherent and coordinated action.

We desperately need to see resolute advances in the fight against terrorism, violent extremism and organized crime in the Sahel. Without significant gains, it will become increasingly difficult to reverse the security trajectory in the Sahel and the further expansion of insecurity towards the West African coastal countries. The recent instability in the Sudan, in the eastern part of the Sahel, is yet another cause for concern. The devastating effects of continuing destabilization would be felt far beyond the region and the African continent.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank Ms. Pobee for her briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Tiaré.

Mr. Tiaré (*spoke in French*): I would first like to congratulate your country, Switzerland, Madam President, both on its election in June 2022 by the General Assembly to the Security Council and this month on its presidency of the Council for the first time in Switzerland's history. I wish Switzerland a constructive term and hope it will be re-elected in future.

I would also like to thank you for this opportunity to address the Security Council following the presentation of the Secretary-General's report (S/2023/328) on the operationalization of the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel (G-5 Sahel). I thank all the members of the Council for their participation in this meeting, which attests to their interest in the issues at stake in the current situation in the Sahel and in Africa. I commend the representatives of the African members of the Council for their important contribution to the debate within the Council on issues related to peace and security in Africa and convey our full support. Lastly, I would like to commend Ms. Martha Ama Akyaa Pobee for her outstanding and informative presentation of the report, which I am sure held Council members' full attention.

The complex situation in the Sahel in general, and in the G-5 Sahel countries in particular, which the Secretary-General accurately describes in his report, is of concern to all of us, especially the Security Council, whose primary responsibility is the maintenance of international peace and security. The fact is that despite the efforts made so far, both individually by the countries directly affected by the crisis and collectively within the regional framework of the G-5 Sahel, the security situation has continued to deteriorate. It is very different from the situation in 2014, when the G-5 was founded, and in 2017, when the Joint Force was established for the specific purpose of addressing the rapid expansion of armed and violent extremist groups and the deteriorating situation in the region.

It has become clear that the attacks by armed groups, which have increased over the past years, primarily in the three border areas, have been carried out by two groups — Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin and the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara. The groups clearly rely not on foreigners but on local actors and leaders, who are based in their area of operations and coordinate all the groups' actions. Facing this new situation, and looking back, we are prompted to ask if we could have avoided these problems in the area represented by the G-5 Sahel and encompassing the countries of the Gulf of Guinea if we had listened to the many calls to step up the Joint Force's operationalization and response. We must also acknowledge that the G-5 Sahel is in a particularly difficult situation, among other things because of a poor understanding of that situation and the failure of the international community to draw lessons from it. Indeed, since its establishment, in 2017,

the Joint Force has been unable to be truly operational because of a lack of sustainable funding and of aircraft and intelligence equipment. Nonetheless, as mentioned in the Secretary-General's report (S/2023/328), in spite of that, and as other reports have also shown, the Force has achieved results on the ground, notwithstanding the insecurity it faces.

With regard to support, the logistical support programme must be commended. The Force benefited from the programme following the 2018 tripartite agreement among the United Nations, the European Union and the Executive Secretariat of the G-5 Sahel, which expires on 23 June, and the implementation of the human rights and international humanitarian law compliance framework. In that regard, I am pleased to inform the Council that earlier today, at 10 a.m., at the headquarters of the G-5 Sahel, General Hanena Ould Sidi, Minister of Defence of Mauritania, presided over the opening ceremony of a technical workshop in support of the regional protection of civilians strategy in the G-5 Sahel space. Work has been under way for some days, and participants include officials of the État-major de Coordination de la Force Conjointe du G-5 Sahel, representatives of the G-5 Sahel Women's Platform, young people and partners within the United Nations system and the International Committee of the Red Cross.

As members know, the Heads of State of the G-5 Sahel, at their sixth extraordinary summit, held on 20 February under the presidency of His Excellency Mr. Mohamed Ould Cheikh El Ghazouani, President of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania, reaffirmed their readiness to preserve and strengthen the G-5 Sahel as an important framework for cooperation and coordination. They welcomed the new structure of the Joint Force and its adaptation to the current environment and expressed their firm willingness to support, through appropriate means, the new configuration of the Joint Force and the implementation of the État-major de Coordination de la Force Conjointe du G-5 Sahel, with Niamey as its headquarters, along with a reduced team of 15 for the time being. The concept of operations has already been finalized at the expert level with respect to personnel, battalions, chain of command and operating budget. Everything is ready and awaits only the endorsement of the G-5 Sahel Ministers of Defence and Army Chiefs of Staff. The concept of operations will be submitted to the African Union Peace and Security Council for endorsement before being transmitted to the Security Council.

Given that the Sahel is at a crossroads, with ever-increasing terrorism, which poses a serious threat to international peace and security, it is absolutely vital that we provide support for the operationalization of the Joint Force of the G-5 Sahel, which is now one of the rare forces in the subregion with a strategy and 14 battalions that are ready to engage with armed terrorist groups. When rewriting the concept of operations, military experts laid the groundwork for the Force to achieve optimal results in addressing security issues. However, in order to be as effective as possible, the Force needs what it has always lacked and has always sought to be operational — sustainable funding and equipment. As we seek to counter terrorism, all our efforts must be geared towards providing a clear response. How do we mobilize all local, national, regional, social, cultural, economic and other forces in order to eliminate the root causes of insecurity, while using military means to stem its effects?

In addition to its military strategy, because the G-5 Sahel knows that the fight cannot be won by weapons alone, it also works on other aspects of the issue, such as development, the prevention of violent extremism, climate change and so on. With regard to climate change, I would like to congratulate Switzerland for adding the issue of climate change to the priorities of the Security Council. Indeed, while already grappling with a deep-seated political, security, social and humanitarian and crisis, the Sahel is considered one of the regions that is most vulnerable to climate change, which has an adverse effect on human freedoms and on keeping the peace, in particular in rural areas.

Given the respective positions of Council members, they all know what is occurring in the Sahel. There are hundreds of victims, civilians and troops alike, and millions of internally displaced persons, as mentioned in the Secretary-General's report, including women and children. All they ask is to be able to return to their villages, live in dignity and return to their traditional jobs. There are thousands of children on the streets because schools are now closed. The Council also knows what is happening at the borders of some countries of the Sahel and the Gulf of Guinea, and what will happen if the situation at the tri-border area is not brought under control. That is why we need to provide an urgent, robust and strong response. To achieve that, a comprehensive and action-oriented strategy is required that draws on existing mechanisms, although those mechanisms have challenges. In that regard, I would like to commend the Secretary-General's position on the issue, as he

recognizes that the G-5 Sahel Joint Force remains an important regional initiative that complements the multifaceted efforts of the United Nations and other international partners in the region and deserves the support of the international community.

The message is very clear. We also take this opportunity to thank the European Union for its commitment to working with us to determine the operational support that the European Union can provide to the G-5 Sahel to contribute to meeting the needs of the Joint Force. Although we must act swiftly in the short term to ensure that the serious crisis in the Sahel does not spread to other parts of Africa, it is absolutely vital that we address the root causes of the crisis. We therefore hope that the recommendations of the Independent High-Level Panel on Security and Development in the Sahel, chaired by the former President of the Niger, Mahamadou Issoufou, will receive the necessary attention and support from the international community and all partners in order to ensure a return to peace, security and development in the Sahel so that the Sahelian people can thrive.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Tiaré for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Diouf.

Ms. Diouf (*spoke in French*): First of all, I would like to thank Switzerland for giving me the opportunity and honour to brief the Security Council on the issues of climate change and security in the Sahel.

The issues of climate change and security are closely linked, as climate change is the cause of phenomena that provoke tensions, violence and conflicts. The risks and impacts are particularly acute in exposed, unprepared and vulnerable regions such as the Sahel. The Sahel is one of the areas most exposed to climate risks and one of the most vulnerable due to its fragile institutions and low resilience. Some studies recognize the Sahel as one of the three ecological hotspots, which include areas under increased environmental stress and more likely to collapse. The climate of the Sahel is characterized by extreme temperatures, fluctuating rainfall and severe drought. According to the United Nations, the region is particularly vulnerable to climate change, with temperatures rising 1.5 times faster than the global average. Almost all Sahelian countries are affected by multiple phenomena — droughts, water stress, land degradation and declining yields. Problems of access to water and food are also the cause of health problems and migration.

In recent years, the impact of environmental problems on the stability of some African territories, in particular in the Sahel, has become clear. Competition over access to water or natural resources is the source of tensions among communities. For example, it was not many years ago that Lake Chad provided sufficient water for the populations of the Niger, Nigeria, Cameroon and Chad, but since the lake has been gradually drying up, entire populations have been migrating towards Chad to continue to benefit from it. As resources become scarcer, the struggle for access to them increases — a context in which Boko Haram prospers. This large lake, which is shared by five countries with more than 43 million inhabitants, has seen its water levels fall by 80 per cent in 40 years, making the communities vulnerable and increasing poverty. That creates a potential recruiting ground for men, and sometimes even women, as well as desperate young people who are ready to do anything to earn a living, including joining a terrorist organization.

Another important factor for conflict in the Sahel region is that the percentage of fertile land is diminishing and causing farmers to migrate, often to lands belonging to nomad pastoralists, who are being prevented from using their traditional transhumance routes. In some cases, the herders then take over private or protected property in order to keep their animals alive. The situation in the Sahel is therefore a prime example of the various problems that can arise from intensified competition for resources, including conflicts between nomadic herders and farmers, migration, radicalization and the exploitation of resources.

The Sahel's climate and security crises are acute. Strengthening the capacities of communities and local actors to respond and adapt to shocks is essential and urgent. Insecurity and cross-border conflicts in the Sahel countries are driven by many actors and by complex factors. Some of those are related to poor governance, discrimination, inequities, the scarcity of resources and poverty, which contribute to insecurity and the intensification of civil conflict and violent extremism. There is a worrisome possibility that the tensions and conflicts could be inflamed by the increased competition over resources — land, water and food — as well as the ongoing degradation of the land, while some of those factors could be further exacerbated by climate change.

Because of its arid climate, recurring droughts and humanitarian crises, the threat of climate change is ever present in the Sahel. In Mali, for example, reports of Islamic extremists and transnational criminal networks in the Sahel region are raising concerns that the Sahel

could become an area where terrorism will take root and flourish if appropriate measures are not taken to address the security and climate crises simultaneously and very rapidly. The Niger and Burkina Faso have both experienced episodes of drought and food insecurity and are marked by factors that analysts believe are strongly correlated with instability and conflict, in that they are landlocked and have very low revenues. All those factors add to the complexity of the challenges that they face in building resilience to climate change and ensuring the security of their citizens. In both countries there are a number of underlying sources of conflict that could potentially be triggered or exacerbated by future climate stress. In addition, the continued insecurity and conflict have led to increased displacement in the region. For example, in Burkina Faso, more than 2 million people have been displaced, the majority of them women and children. The massive displacement of the country's population has put additional pressure on its already limited resources and threatens to ignite intercommunity rivalries.

The current situation in the Sahel clearly shows that terrorism feeds on conflict, despair and the vulnerabilities of communities, especially those that are caused by climate change. Before I conclude, I would like to make some recommendations. Addressing the multiple crises affecting the Sahel in a sustainable manner requires coordinated responses. It is no longer relevant to address the crisis in the Sahel on the basis of security issues. We need multisectoral responses that take into account current and future climate issues. The solutions provided must also be built with and by the communities to ensure sustainability and ownership. The local level is a good entry point for integrating the climate change and security dimension into community-based policies and projects that are suited to the populations' needs and do not harm their rights. Those initiatives should be inclusive and put both young people and women and the centre.

Finally, it is crucial to provide the necessary climate financing to facilitate adaptation with a view to strengthening community resilience. The cost of adaptation remains very high for the Sahel countries, whose State budgets cannot fully cover it. It is all very well to talk about how vulnerable the Sahel region is, but ultimately if it does not receive adequate funding for addressing the various challenges, the crisis there is likely to stagnate. We do not want that. And our communities do not deserve that.

In conclusion, I would once again like to commend and thank Switzerland and the members of the Council for taking the time to listen to me. May peace, security and serenity return to the Sahel.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank Ms. Diouf for her briefing.

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements.

Mr. De Rivière (France) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank Ms. Pobee, Mr. Tiaré and Ms. Diouf for their briefings.

The primary challenge in the Sahel is obviously a political one, as it involves strengthening State systems and consolidating democracy. France calls for the transitions in Burkina Faso, Mali, Guinea and Chad to be carried out within the agreed time frames. We welcome the efforts of the United Nations, the African Union, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Economic Community of Central African States to support those processes. Twenty years after their adoption, the ECOWAS protocols remain a reference framework for democracy and good governance, including by promoting freedom of the press, assembly and peaceful demonstrations and the possibility for political parties to participate freely in elections, and by dedicating an entire chapter to the participation of women and young people.

Next, I would like to mention climate change, which is having particularly noticeable effects in the Sahel. We can already see its effects on populations, food security and access to water. The diminishing of cultivation and grazing areas is a clear factor in the region's destabilization. It is urgent that the Security Council listen to its African members, who are constantly reminding us about the links between climate and security and did so today quite vividly. France commends the work being done in the field by the climate, peace and security advisers of the United Nations missions and calls for that network to be strengthened. We also call on the Member States to join the Climate Security Mechanism. What we have to do is establish a virtuous circle of development and climate action. That is the essence of the Great Green Wall initiative, which aims to combat the effects of climate change, desertification, food insecurity and poverty, from Senegal to Djibouti. France has helped to mobilize €6 billion for that project. Finally, it is urgent that we respond appropriately to the threat of terrorism in the region, and by that I mean three things.

First, the response must be sustainable, and to that end, it must be based on respect for the rule of law. Abuses against civilians and the disproportionate use of force are unacceptable and only fuel the dangerous spiral of violence. That is why France will continue to condemn the actions and abuses of the Wagner Group in Africa and elsewhere. The actions of these mercenaries are deadly, incompatible with the rule of law, inefficient and predatory for natural resources and State budgets. In that respect, the United Nations report on the abuses committed against civilians in Moura, Mali in March 2022 is concerning. It is an important step towards recognizing the victims and their need for justice, as well as the fight against impunity.

Secondly, the response must be a collective one. We cannot oppose a national and regional approach. Progress is possible only if we work on all levels — both by strengthening the national armed forces and enhancing cooperation between them. The Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel remains relevant in that respect, and we welcome the reconfiguration efforts under way, which reflect the commitment of the four countries concerned to adapt to the new context. The Accra Initiative and the Multinational Joint Task Force are also major initiatives. We hope that the report of the Independent High-Level Panel on Security and Development in the Sahel, led by President Issoufou, will give new impetus to those regional coordination efforts.

Finally, the response must be substantial. France and the European Union (EU) have been engaged in partnership with the region for over a decade. The EU recently deployed a new military partnership mission, in response to the Niger's request. The international community must therefore do more. France and its partners stand ready to support regional initiatives. Their framework and the expectations of the actors in the region must be spelled out. Furthermore, France fully subscribes to the idea that African operations should benefit from sustainable funding, with the help of the United Nations. We will discuss this again on 25 May.

Mr. DeLaurentis (United States of America): I thank Assistant Secretary-General Pobee and Executive Secretary Tiaré for their briefings. I also thank Ms. Diouf for her important remarks centred on the link between security and climate change.

The United States welcomes the efforts of Burkina Faso, Chad, Mauritania and the Niger to revitalize the Group of Five for the Sahel (G-5 Sahel), including through the 20 February extraordinary summit of Heads of State. In particular, we applaud Mauritania's efforts as the newly appointed G-5 Sahel to revitalize the G-5 Sahel institution and refocus its political security and development goals, as outlined in its recently published road map.

The United States is especially concerned about the security, humanitarian and political crises unfolding in the Sahel. These stem primarily from governance failures. While we respect the need for Sahelian States to address the scourge of terrorism and other violence within their borders, we urge them to recognize the limitations of militarized approaches and to redouble efforts to address structural drivers of instability. That includes enhancing governance, strengthening democratic institutions, improving access to services and justice and respecting human rights and the rule of law. We remain concerned about State-led military operations in Mali and Burkina Faso that have led to large-scale civilian casualties and reports of human rights violations.

In Mali, the transition Government's short-sighted partnership with the Kremlin-backed Wagner Group has not produced greater security for the Malian people. Instead, reported human rights abuses are fuelling grievances among already marginalized groups.

According to the February report of the United Nations Development Programme on violent extremism in Africa, Government-led human rights violations and abuses often serve as a trigger event, accelerating recruitment into violent extremist organizations among at-risk groups. We are appalled by the egregious disregard for human life exhibited by elements of the Malian armed forces, in cooperation with the Wagner Group transnational criminal organization during the operation in Moura last year.

We commend the United Nations for its diligence and tenacity in investigating the horrific civilian massacre of civilians in Moura, especially considering the restrictions on the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). We recall that the Mission is mandated to investigate and report on allegations of human rights violations and abuses, and we are deeply troubled by the transition Government's restrictions on the MINUSMA's freedom of movement, in violation of the status-of-forces agreement.

We urge the transition Government to uphold its responsibilities as host country to a United Nations peacekeeping operation. We encourage the transition Government to fully consider the recommendations outlined in the United Nations report, including pursuing an independent, impartial, efficient, exhaustive and transparent investigation to hold those responsible accountable. We remain disappointed in Mali's decision last year to withdraw from the G-5 Sahel and urge transition authorities to immediately rejoin the coalition. The interrelated threats of terrorism and violent extremism, climate change and criminal networks span borders and require transnational approaches.

We extend our support to Burkina Faso, Chad and Mali to complete their transitions to democratically elected civilian Governments. We and other partners are keen to consider restarting currently restricted support. The election of democratic Governments would help us resume such assistance. In that regard, we welcome the Malian transition Government's announcement of a new date for the delayed constitutional referendum and encourage strict adherence to the agreed timetable of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) for completing Mali's political transition. We look forward to the joint strategic assessment on the Sahel being undertaken by the United Nations, the African Union, ECOWAS and the G-5 Sahel. The United States stands ready to deepen our support for effective solutions to advance peace and security in the region.

Mr. Dai Bing (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Assistant Secretary-General Pobee and Executive Secretary Tiaré for their briefings. I also listened to the briefing made by Ms. Diouf.

Recently, countries in the Sahel, in the face of the complex and difficult international and regional situation, have worked hard to maintain common security, restore economic and social development and strengthen regional solidarity and cooperation, with some positive results.

As pointed out in the Secret General's report (S/2023/328), maintaining security and stability in the Sahel is of major strategic importance to the consolidation of peace and development in the subregion and the African continent. The international community and the Security Council should pay more attention to

the difficulties and needs faced by the countries of the region and provide help and support that is more fit for purpose.

First, interregional solidarity and cooperation is the only way to address common challenges. The Sahel faces multiple threats, such as terrorism, humanitarian crisis, poverty, underdevelopment and climate change. In February, countries in the Sahel convened a special summit to reaffirm the need to strengthen regional solidarity and to pool together to address challenges. China welcomes that initiative. The countries of the region should uphold the concept of common security and common development and restore and strengthen regional cooperation on the basis of a balanced accommodation of the concerns of all parties. The international community should respect the sovereignty and ownership of the countries of the region and provide constructive support for deepening regional cooperation. The international community should draw lessons from the situation in the Sudan, maintain an appropriate level of patience with regard to the political transition of certain countries, provide more support and encouragement and safeguard overall regional stability. China looks forward to the United Nations-African Union joint assessment coming up with practical and viable recommendations as soon as possible, thus injecting new momentum into regional cooperation.

Secondly, combating terrorism is a top priority. Recently, the Group of Five for the Sahel (G-5 Sahel) agreed to restructure its joint force. The Economic Community of West African States announced the operationalization of its standby force. Countries, including Mali, Burkina Faso and the Niger, are actively carrying out counter-terrorism operations and deepening their cooperation in the security sector. Those efforts deserve to be commended.

Meanwhile, violent and terrorist activities in the region are still on the rise, with terrorist groups attacking armed forces, ransacking villages and blocking roads, causing massive civilian casualties and displacements. The situation on the ground is dire. The international community should give top priority to supporting regional efforts to combat terrorism and maintain stability; focus on helping countries of the region strengthen security sector capacity-building and respect their right to engage in independent external security cooperation. In response to the needs of regional counter-terrorism operations in terms of equipment,

logistics and funding, among other needs, the European Union and other major donors should maintain their level of assistance, while the United Nations and the Security Council should actively explore new ways to provide support.

Some colleagues referred to the issue of human rights. In our view, counter-terrorism operations are fundamentally about safeguarding human security. Human rights should surely be respected and protected. However, human rights should not be used as a political tool to interfere with counter-terrorism operations, much less coupled with the provision of counter-terrorism support.

Thirdly, by deepening systemic development, we can address the heart of the problem. According to a report by the United Nations Development Programme issued in February, destitution, unemployment and the lack of livelihoods were among the main drivers for people in the Sahel to join violent extremist groups. To root out terrorism in the Sahel, military and security means alone are not sufficient. We must tackle both the symptoms and the root causes. The international community should support the development of the Sahel with a greater sense of urgency, give the development agenda more prominence, guarantee and improve people's livelihoods, and protect and promote human rights through development. Only in doing so can people in the region acquire greater prosperity and security.

Promoting sustainable development is a key objective for the practical cooperation between China and countries in the region. China has worked with Mali on agriculture technology, built solar power plants for Burkina Faso and provided emergency food aid and medical supplies to Mauritania, the Niger and Chad, bringing tangible help to the countries in the region to improve their livelihoods and promote nationally owned development. China stands ready to work with the international community to provide more support to regional countries in the areas of poverty reduction, food security, agriculture, livestock production, infrastructure, construction and development financing. And we hope that the Office of the Special Coordinator for Development in the Sahel and other United Nations agencies will play a greater role in mobilizing resources for development.

Mr. De Almeida Filho (Brazil): I thank Ms. Martha Pobeé and Mr. Eric Tiaré for their informative briefings. We listened attentively to Ms. Diouf.

While recognizing the challenges faced by the Group of Five for the Sahel (G-5 Sahel), we should highlight the remarkable resilience it has shown. In the past few months, we witnessed the first Summit of Heads of State of the G-5 Sahel since 2021, which underscores the determination of the four remaining countries to continue to engage in order to tackle common problems.

However, as the Secretary-General pointed out in his most recent report (S/2023/328), the process of reform of the G-5 Sahel Joint Force has brought about the cessation of military operations. That development is one more instance of how political factors can hamper efforts to combat violence and terrorism.

The transnational nature of the security challenges in the Sahel demand regionally based responses. In that context, Brazil is encouraged by the many regional initiatives, based on diplomacy and cooperation, that have been promoting coordinated responses to the security issues that are affecting West Africa, especially the continuous rise of terrorist activities. I highlight, in particular, the creation of the Joint Military Staff Committee of the Sahel Region, the establishment of the Multinational Joint Task Force of the Accra Initiative, as well as the standby force of the Economic Community of West African States.

There can be no lasting peace and stability in the Sahel if the root causes of conflict are not addressed. It is a well-established fact that armed groups take root in areas with little or non-existent State presence. Democratic and inclusive institutions, with regular, free and fair elections, as well as respect for minorities, are necessary to create stable societies. In that vein, Brazil encourages the transitional authorities in the region to implement the respective transition plans without delay in order to allow for the complete return to constitutional normality.

We must also address the dire humanitarian situation in the region. Food insecurity, forced displacements and a lack of economic prospects are aggravated by the actions of terrorist and other illegal armed groups. Desperate individuals are easy prey for such organizations. As mentioned by Brazil in March (see S/PV.9296, p. 14), a recent United Nations Development Programme report on extremism in Africa shows that economic incentives are important

drivers that pull individuals towards terrorist activities. The report makes it clear that we must move away from exclusively security-driven responses and adopt development-based approaches.

In that regard and in conclusion, we look forward to the recommendations that will be included in the independent strategic assessments currently being prepared by the Independent High-Level Panel on Security and Development in the Sahel.

Mr. Montalvo Sosa (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): We welcome the statements this morning by Ms. Martha Pobeé, Assistant Secretary-General for Africa; Mr. Eric Tiaré, Executive Secretary of the Group of Five for the Sahel (G-5 Sahel), and the statement by Ms. Diouf, civil society expert on climate change.

The information we received describes a worrisome security situation in the Sahel region, which is of strategic importance not only for the African continent. The indiscriminate use of violence and the presence of terrorist groups in the region has a direct impact on the civilian population, forcing them to flee and be displaced. The humanitarian situation is critical. There are millions of internally displaced persons owing to the current violence, which affects and harms primarily women and girls.

Ecuador has rejected and condemned terrorism in all its forms, regardless of its origin. In some regions, terrorism is connected to transnational organized crime and exacerbates the illicit trafficking in arms and natural resources, drug trafficking and other related activities.

We are convinced that cooperation between the United Nations and regional and subregional organizations is essential to overcome the global challenges posed by terrorism in the world. And we agree with the Secretary-General that transnational problems require cooperative and comprehensive responses. That is why the G-5 Sahel Joint Force is key to combating groups operating across porous borders.

A large part of the international community considers Mali's withdrawal from the Joint Force to be detrimental to the effectiveness of its operations, as it disrupts its geographical continuity. Ecuador shares that view, and therefore welcomes the meetings between Mali and the Niger in early March, in which they agreed to strengthen bilateral cooperation against terrorism. We believe that the return of Mali to the Joint Force would benefit the entire region. Without peace in Mali there cannot be peace in the Sahel.

We appreciate the efforts undertaken by the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali to fulfil its mandate to implement the technical agreement to provide supplies to the G-5 Sahel Joint Force, despite the complex technical and operational conditions. These conditions would also improve with the return of Mali to the Joint Force.

We also appreciate the progress made in reforming the Joint Force's structure and revitalizing its security architecture. We hope that these efforts will result in greater effectiveness in its operations and also allow it to cooperate with other bodies focused on the fight against terrorism in the region, such as the Accra Initiative and the Joint Military Committee of the Sahel Region.

This fight must be pursued within the framework of respect for international human rights law, international humanitarian law and refugee law. In this regard, we commend the support offered to the Joint Force by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner in the implementation of the compliance framework for these rights, as well as the human rights due diligence policy. The progress in capacity-building in the Joint Force is encouraging. It is also important to counter the corrosive narratives and hate speech, intolerance and xenophobia that fuel violent extremism, for example by drawing on the experiences of countries in the region, such as the Niger and Mauritania, which have taken initiatives to foster intracommunal and intercommunal dialogue.

How can we achieve sustainable peace in the Sahel region if we do not address the root causes of conflict to complement security responses? It is essential to address the primary needs of the population and strengthen State presence across all territories and throughout the region.

It is in that context that we appreciate the written advice of the Peacebuilding Commission whose role we support. It is necessary to channel the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals as a priority, for which we recognize the need for enhanced coordination and cooperation between Governments and national and regional offices of the United Nations, as well as with international financial institutions. It is necessary to open more financial channels and flows for the benefit of national programmes, projects and strategies. Listening to Ms. Diouf on climate change, for example, could be very useful in the light of the agreements reached in the main forum to address this issue, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and its Paris Agreement.

Finally, we highlight the role of the Peacebuilding Fund as a catalytic fund for financing in countries vulnerable to conflict and recall that political stability is key to progress towards a peaceful and secure environment. We hope for an early return to constitutional order in all countries of the region, including those in political transitions, namely, Burkina Faso, Chad and Mali. Political transition must be accompanied by a commitment to implementing measures to achieve lasting peace and security in the region.

Mr. Kariuki (United Kingdom): I thank Assistant Secretary-General Pobee, Executive Secretary Tiaré and Ms. Diouf for their briefings.

The Sahel is in crisis: escalating violence at the hands of extremist groups, democratic governance and human rights under threat, and vast humanitarian needs and food insecurity, all exacerbated by climate change and the impact of Russia's war in Ukraine.

Those challenges need to be tackled by the countries of the Sahel, supported by international partners, through a determined show of political will, commitment to human rights and regional cooperation. The United Kingdom remains committed to supporting the Sahel and its people. We contributed approximately \$284 million to the region last year.

Let me set out three priorities for the coming period.

First, with three States of the region in the middle of political transitions, the continued leadership of the Economic Community of West African States and the African Union is vital. We urge the Burkinabe, Chadian and Malian authorities to adhere to agreed election timetables.

Secondly, counter-terrorism operations must respect human rights and international humanitarian law. To do otherwise risks aggravating grievances, undermining trust with local communities and driving recruitment to terrorist groups.

We welcome the Group of Five for the Sahel's reaffirmed commitment to the compliance framework under its new structures and its ongoing work with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). We continue to urge further progress towards implementation of human rights due diligence mitigation measures, as recommended by the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA).

At the same time, we are deeply concerned by the disturbing findings in last week's OHCHR report on the massacre of hundreds of people in Moura, Mali by Malian security forces and the Russian-backed Wagner Group. As High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk has said, such cases of summary executions, rape and torture amount to war crimes. We fully support MINUSMA's role in investigating and reporting on human rights violations and abuses, and we urge the Malian authorities to strengthen their cooperation with the United Nations and respect MINUSMA's freedom of movement.

New reports of around 150 civilian fatalities, including 45 children, following an attack by armed forces in the village of Karma, Burkina Faso on 20 April, are also deeply disturbing. We urge all States in the region to fully respect their obligations under international law.

Thirdly, we agree with the message in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2023/328) that regionally led solutions are the most effective way to create lasting peace and stability. The Accra Initiative is a promising example, and we look forward to supporting its members' efforts. We hope the forthcoming report of the Independent High-Level Panel on Security and Development in the Sahel will bring greater coherence between different initiatives in the Sahel.

Ms. Dautllari (Albania): I thank Assistant Secretary-General Pobee, Executive Secretary of the Group of Five for the Sahel Tiaré and Ms. Diouf for their briefings.

Albania considers the Group of Five for the Sahel (G-5 Sahel) to be an important regionally led initiative in strengthening stability and security in the Sahel, particularly as the region grapples with a multidimensional crisis.

Allow me to focus on three key areas. First, we are concerned about the worsening of the security situation in the Sahel. Terrorism and violent extremism have reached unprecedented levels, risking spillover to coastal States and threatening regional stability. Sustained counter-terrorism initiatives, operations and security cooperation remain vital and should be conducted in respect of human rights and international humanitarian law.

We welcome the restructuring of the Joint Force, which represents an opportunity to further mainstream it. We also encourage the continued engagement with

the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to uphold international humanitarian law, including through the compliance framework, setting an important precedent for United Nations engagement with regional forces, as mentioned in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2023/328).

At the same time, the Moura report published last week is a testament to the necessity to conduct military operations in accordance with human rights and international law. The findings of the report are disturbing and raise concerns about the presence of the Wagner Group. We call for those responsible to be held accountable.

Secondly, the political environment in the Sahel remains fragile. With several States under military rule, we urge the transitional authorities to respect the timelines agreed with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and facilitate a timely return to civilian rule. The trend of unconstitutional changes of Government risks undoing the democratic gains already made. In that regard, regional cooperation remains critical. We encourage the G-5 Sahel to continue dialogue and cooperation with its members and to sustain the momentum to invigorate collaboration. We welcome the leadership of the African Union, ECOWAS and the United Nations, as well as the recent discussions under the Accra Initiative, as a mechanism to foster greater security and regionally led solutions. We look forward to the issuance of the recommendations of the Independent High-Level Panel on Security and Development in the Sahel, led by former President Issoufou, on strengthening responses to address the Sahel crisis.

Thirdly, with about 30 million people in need of humanitarian assistance, the Sahel crisis requires a holistic approach that addresses the root causes of the conflict. As we heard from Ms. Diouf, we need to address the adverse effects of climate change, which is a major driver of insecurity and even amplifies conflicts by increasing the fight for resources. Therefore, military interventions alone are not enough to tackle the crisis; they must be complemented with humanitarian and development efforts to strengthen institutions, enhance the rule of law and promote socioeconomic opportunities, while advocating for the representation and participation of women and young people at all levels.

In conclusion, it is clear that the G-5 Sahel remains critical for promoting regional security. We commend the sustained efforts to operationalize the Joint Force. However, we must see genuine political will and engagement to advance the agreed reforms. All States in the region have a part to play in strengthening the collective fight against terrorism in order to build a just and prosperous Sahel for its people.

Mr. Agyeman (Ghana): I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the three African members of the Security Council, namely, Gabon, Mozambique and Ghana (A3).

We welcome the report of the Secretary-General (S/2023/328) and thank Assistant Secretary-General Pobee, as well as Ambassador Tiaré, Executive Secretary of the Group of Five for the Sahel (G-5 Sahel), for their comprehensive briefings and pertinent insights concerning the situation in the Sahel. We also welcome the remarks of Ms. Diouf, who spoke on behalf of Enda Energy and the Climate Action Network for West and Central Africa.

We welcome the positive developments within the G-5 Sahel since the previous briefing to the Security Council (see S/PV.9194), including the Heads of State summit held on 20 February, which witnessed the successful rotation of the Group's presidency to Mauritania, as well as the subsequent ministerial meeting held on 20 March, at which the revitalization of the Group's security architecture, as well as its efforts to sustain dialogue with Mali, was discussed. We also welcome the support provided by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to the G-5 Sahel Joint Force relating to the human rights and international humanitarian law compliance framework, and we commend the latter for its determination to comply with existing obligations.

Despite those positive developments, we remain worried about the deteriorating security situation in the Sahel, characterized by increasing incidents of terrorist attacks and the use of improvised explosive devices. While strongly condemning such attacks against civilian and security personnel in the region, including in Burkina Faso, we pay tribute to the gallant soldiers who continue to sacrifice their lives for peace in the region, and we commiserate with the families of all those who have lost their lives.

The A3 recalls that the destabilization of the Sahel region is directly connected to the destabilization of Libya. We note with concern the spillover effect on the Sahel of the lingering crisis in Libya, as well as its

spread to coastal countries such as Togo and Benin. We therefore call for coordinated action to help manage the adverse impact of that development on the countries of the region and to provide the G-5 Sahel Joint Force with the support it requires to enable it to operate effectively. In that regard, we also note that the Joint Force, which has been successful in carrying out major operations against terrorist organizations and insurgency groups, has not enjoyed the same measure of financial support in recent times. Indeed, we believe that, notwithstanding its challenges, the G-5 Sahel Joint Force remains an essential complementary mechanism for addressing the evolving security situation in the Sahel. It is therefore important to enhance our collective efforts to galvanize the required support for the Joint Force.

Further to the issues I have raised, the A3 wishes to highlight the following points, which we consider to be critical for enhancing the responsiveness of the Joint Force.

First, we encourage the further efforts of the Heads of State and Ministers of the Group to revitalize the Joint Force through the adoption of a reconfigured concept of operations and additional operational arrangements to meet the new security dynamics. We also welcome the nomination of a new Force Commander and the adoption of additional prudential measures to operate a more cost-effective Group and Joint Force.

Secondly, we welcome the prioritization of efforts to address governance and development challenges in order to undercut the radicalization agenda of terrorists and other armed groups, which have targeted young people and local communities in their efforts to destabilize the countries of the G-5 Sahel, while looting their natural resources. In that context, we encourage coordination across the three pillars of governance, resilience and security of the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel, and we urge the leveraging of the commitment made at recent meetings of the Group's Heads of State and Ministers. We encourage further investments in non-kinetic measures to tackle the underlying causes of instability, including with regard to governance and development deficits. We consider it useful to embrace a multidimensional and whole-of-society approach that empowers, at all levels, critical agents of change, such as women and young people, in the development, conflict prevention and governance processes of the countries of the Sahel. Equally important is the intervening role of the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) in addressing the dire socioeconomic conditions, including through

agricultural self-employment and other developmental interventions, such as quick-impact community projects. In that regard, we also welcome the forward-looking recommendations contained in the advisory note of the PBC for today's meeting.

Thirdly, we encourage further support from Member States, especially donor partners, in addressing the infrastructure deficits of the Joint Force, which have manifested themselves in the ongoing technical and operational challenges resulting from the lack of storage capacity at some battalion locations and the insufficient maintenance of storage equipment, as well as insecurity along supply routes.

Fourthly, while underscoring the critical logistical and operational support provided to the Joint Force by the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), we remain worried about the logistical and operational challenges facing MINUSMA itself, including as a result of the gradual withdrawal of some troop-contributing countries from the Mission. In that regard, the consistent call by the Secretary-General for the Council to have a convergence of views on addressing the logistical and funding challenges facing the Mission in order to enhance its robustness is essential. While we reflect on the options provided by the Secretary-General in the strategic review report of the Mission (S/2023/36), it is important for us to do so in a manner that enables us to arrive at an option that would make MINUSMA effective, as well as able to sustain its support to the G-5 Sahel Joint Force in responding to the challenging security environment.

Fifthly, we need to leverage the complementary role of other regional mechanisms, such as the Accra Initiative, the Nouakchott process and the Multinational Joint Task Force, in addressing the security challenges of the Sahel. We remain hopeful that the broad consultations by the Independent High-Level Panel on Security and Development in the Sahel, led by former President Issoufou, on the strategic assessment on the Sahel will provide practical and forward-looking recommendations that will help to harmonize all relevant regional mechanisms in order to consolidate the gains made in tackling the security situation in the Sahel.

Sixthly and lastly, we remain concerned about the dire humanitarian situation arising from heightened insecurity in the region, including the increased

displacements. The adverse impact of climate change on the security and humanitarian situation also requires greater attention. While appealing to development and donor partners to consider scaling up their funding support for the region's humanitarian fund, we also urge for prioritizing support for building climate resilience among member countries. It is equally important for the Council to be united in its views on providing support to the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel to execute its mandate, including in the area of advocacy related to the impact of climate on security.

In conclusion, the A3 believes it is important for the Council to move beyond the narrative of affirming support for the critical role of the G-5 Sahel Joint Force by heeding the long-standing call to provide predictable funding to help deal with the logistical and operational challenges affecting its effectiveness. The future of the region of the Sahel is threatened by the deteriorating security situation, and it is now more important than ever to embrace both stronger political will and deeper cooperation at the national, regional and international levels if we are to salvage the situation. The A3 stands in solidarity with the peoples of the Sahel, and we reaffirm our respect for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of all countries of the region. There is no better time to act than now.

Ms. Gatt (Malta): I thank Assistant Secretary-General Pobee, Mr. Tiaré and Ms. Diouf for their informative briefings.

Malta believes that a stable, consistent and viable regional response, backed by international support, is urgently required as part of the solution to the terrorism and violent extremism that has gripped the region. Malta is deeply concerned about the wave of violence that has increased tenfold in recent years, as well as about the humanitarian situation in the region. We must never lose sight of the grave impact that the violence is having on civilians, especially the devastating toll it is taking on children, with staggering increases in killing and maiming, the systematic burning and looting of schools and food insecurity brought about by blockades on villages and the sabotage of water networks. Furthermore, the confirmed killings of hundreds of people in Moura by the Malian armed forces and foreign military personnel are deeply saddening and disturbing. It is important to acknowledge the victims. Justice is needed to combat impunity.

The key to unlocking progress for peace and development among the countries of the region has to confront the multiplicity of their existing challenges, which can be tackled only through enhanced regional leadership and cooperation and the sharing of expertise and solidarity between the Sahelian and coastal communities. Ensuring the protection and welfare of civilians must always be a priority. On that note, and despite the significant challenges of the past year, Malta remains fully supportive of the continued efforts to operationalize the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel. We thank the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali for its continued invaluable support for the Joint Force. In parallel, we look forward to the outcome of the work of the High-Level Panel on Security and Development in the Sahel in proposing innovative ways to address the security challenges aggravated by the spiralling humanitarian and economic problems in the region. We must also take into account the severe consequences of climate change in the region, threatening access to food and water by undermining agricultural activity and severely impairing the health and welfare of vulnerable communities. That triggers conflict over food and water resources, leading to significant difficulties in sustaining livelihoods and amplifying the effects of existing vulnerabilities. And as we have heard today, women and children bear the brunt of that.

A holistic and effective counter-terrorism strategy for the region must include a comprehensive understanding of the drivers of violent extremism and insecurity, as well as whole-of-society approaches to tackling the issues. Resilience should be bolstered by trust in Government systems and their institutions, coupled with respect for human rights. Malta calls on the Governments concerned to deliver the level of governance and justice that their people deserve through transitions to democratic rule and respect for the rule of law. The Economic Community of West African States and the African Union have a central role to play in such efforts. Malta welcomes the cooperation between the Joint Force and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in its support for the Organization's respect for human rights and international humanitarian law obligations, which must underpin the conduct of all military operations.

Malta strongly advocates for increased support for women peacebuilders as agents of change in developing strategies to counter terrorism and violent extremism, including through early-warning mechanisms. We call

for more gender-responsive capacity-strengthening and protection efforts to enable the full, equal and meaningful participation of women in building and sustaining peace and preventing relapses into conflict. Meanwhile, we will continue to back significant efforts for regional cooperation in the Sahel that are aimed at strengthening security and governance, based on respect for human rights and international humanitarian law.

Mrs. Alhefeiti (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank Assistant Secretary-General Martha Pobe and Executive Secretary Eric Tiaré for their comprehensive briefings. We also thank the Peace-building Commission for its valuable recommendations, including on the importance of a regional approach to promoting stability and security in the region.

The United Arab Emirates believes that the Sahel region has a host of opportunities for the achievement of security and development for its people, which will require continued coordination and strengthened efforts to address the region's numerous and varied challenges, particularly considering the spread of terrorism to the West African coast and the threat that poses to regional and international peace and security. In that context, we welcome the outcome of the recent meeting of the leaders of the Group of Five for the Sahel (G-5 Sahel) and the subsequent ministerial meeting, and commend their efforts to reformulate their collective approach to tackling their common challenges and their collective efforts to overcome obstacles. In the context of today's meeting, I would like to discuss four important points that are key to achieving sustainable peace.

First, it is important to make tangible progress in the transition processes that are under way in various countries in the region. That depends on establishing inclusive political processes that can ensure the full, equal and meaningful participation of women and provide young people with opportunities to take part in building institutions that reflect their aspirations. In that regard, we commend the efforts of regional and subregional organizations such as the African Union and the Economic Community of West African States to support political processes by helping the States concerned strengthen their governance and return to constitutional systems, while considering the specific contexts of each State. The States of the region should also continue their cooperation and dialogue with regional and international actors with a view to building bridges and reaching understanding on ways to achieve stability.

Secondly, we must continue to support regional initiatives and mechanisms established to address transnational threats such as terrorism and organized crime, while exploring ways to make such support more effective by actively listening to the views of regional leaders and understanding their needs. Strengthening coordination and consultations in the context of such regional initiatives would undoubtedly contribute to sharing information and lessons learned, ensuring concerted efforts and achieving better results at various levels. The G-5 Joint Force is a critical tool that deserves continued support, and the Security Council should carefully consider the best ways to assist its efficient and sustained operations. We also look forward to the recommendations of the Independent High-Level Panel on Security and Development in the Sahel. Given the complex nature of the challenges facing the region, it is essential for the international community to continually update its methods to keep pace with the evolving conditions on the ground.

Thirdly, we must focus on addressing the root causes of conflicts and extremism, with the goal of promoting the principles of tolerance and peaceful coexistence. It is therefore imperative to implement development initiatives that bridge social and economic gaps and meet the people's needs. By doing so, we can prevent the creation of vacuums that extremist and terrorist groups can exploit to spread their destructive ideologies. In that regard, the closure of approximately 9,000 schools owing to violence in the central Sahel, reported by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), is deplorable and deeply concerning. Education is a critical pillar for protecting societies from extremism and empowering younger generations to build promising futures. If the desired results are to be achieved, we emphasize the importance of aligning the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel with national priorities and needs.

Fourthly, the humanitarian crisis in the Sahel region demands that we find ways to respond effectively to the populations' urgent needs. According to OCHA, nearly 30 million people are in need of assistance. For its part, the United Arab Emirates has been proactive in addressing those conditions by providing more than \$600 million to the five Sahel States over the past five years. Recently, we have also focused on providing relief aid to cope with the influx of people displaced from the Sudan to Chad.

Fifthly and lastly, we stress the need to focus on more sustainable approaches to addressing food insecurity and achieving security and stability in the region. That includes continuing to deepen our understanding of the linkages between climate change and instability in the Sahel, especially the impact of climate change on agriculture, which in turn causes food insecurity and worsening conflict.

We thank Ms. Diouf for her briefing, which highlighted important factors related to climate action in the region. In that regard, we commend the projects supported by the Peacebuilding Fund, such as the Liptako-Gourma region project in Mali, which aims to address conflict patterns associated with climate change. We recognize how important it is to continue building on those efforts.

Mr. Ishikane (Japan): I thank Assistant Secretary-General Pobee, the Executive Secretary of the Group of Five for the Sahel (G-5 Sahel), Mr. Tiaré, and Ms. Diouf for their briefings. I also thank the Peacebuilding Commission for its valuable written comments.

Japan is gravely concerned about the deteriorating security situation in the Sahel. Growing violence and displacement have exacerbated humanitarian needs. Food and energy insecurity, climate change and environmental degradation are compounding existing vulnerabilities. Joint regional and international efforts are ever-more important in tackling those multifaceted challenges. The G-5 Sahel remains an important framework for regional cooperation and cross-border security and development. Japan welcomes the continued commitment shown at the sixth extraordinary summit of Heads of State of the G-5 Sahel, held in February, and the initiative taken by Mauritania in assuming the rotational presidency of the Group. Japan echoes calls by the G-5 Sahel for Mali to rejoin the Group.

The framework should be supported by regional actors and the international community. In that regard, Japan appreciates the tripartite European Union-G-5 Sahel-United Nations agreement, which arranged for the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) to support the Joint Force of the G-5 Sahel. We also commend the initiatives launched by regional partners to combat terrorism and violent extremism, such as the Accra Initiative. Japan welcomes the recent appointment of Special Representative of the Secretary-General Simão as head of the United Nations Office for West Africa and

the Sahel. Japan further hopes that the recommendations in the report to be submitted by the Independent High-Level Panel on Security and Development in the Sahel will contribute to the improvement of joint regional and international responses, based on a candid assessment of the region's challenges.

On the issue of predictable and sustainable resources for regional peace operations, Japan remains fully committed to discussing the matter, including in the context of the recent Secretary-General's report (S/2023/328). Political stability can be derived only from resilient democratic institutions and accountable governance based on the rule of law. Japan calls on the authorities of Mali, Burkina Faso and Chad to prepare for timely, open and inclusive elections — a process that must include the meaningful participation of women, young people and minorities. Japan takes note of the efforts they have made to date and welcomes the role played by other partners, including the Economic Community of West African States and the African Union.

Terrorist groups and violent extremists are exploiting societal fragility. All security operations should have a holistic and comprehensive approach, with a long-term perspective, while incorporating measures to foster social cohesion and address structural fragility by ensuring local ownership through dialogue with community leaders and civil society. Security operations must also respect the rule of law, human rights and international humanitarian law. Japan commends the work of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and MINUSMA to support the G-5 Sahel Joint Force in human rights and humanitarian law compliance, capacity-building and the fight against impunity.

The Council should remain united in supporting the region, especially given the spillover of violence and insecurity into the northern regions of the coastal States and more recently the potentially destabilizing effects of the conflict in the Sudan. As Prime Minister Kishida announced during his visit to Ghana earlier this month, Japan will contribute to peace and stability and promote sustainable growth in the Sahel and the neighbouring coastal countries of the Gulf of Guinea. We remain committed to engaging with the region and supporting regional initiatives.

Ms. Evstigneeva (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank Assistant Secretary-General Martha Pobie and the Executive Secretary of the

Group of Five for the Sahel (G-5 Sahel), Mr. Eric Tiaré, for their briefings. We also listened very carefully to Ms. Aïssatou Diouf.

Terrorism is one of the most pressing pan-African issues. The most complex and serious terrorist threat is in the Sahara-Sahel region. The situation is further compounded by the subversive activities of several extremist groups, against a backdrop of persistent internal political and socioeconomic crises in the States in the region. Terrorist International, which is entrenched in the Sahara-Sahel region, is stepping up its activities and extending its geographical reach, which poses a direct threat to the coastal States of the Gulf of Guinea. The tri-border area of Mali, Burkina Faso and the Niger remains the epicentre of tensions. Militants of the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara and the Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin are highly active in that triangle. The most serious issues are prevalent in Ménaka, Mali, where extremists are fighting for control of the main transportation arteries. It is important for the States of the region to continue to cooperate on security matters. On 24 March, the Niger announced that it would engage in anti-terrorist raids jointly with Mali and is activating its special forces units against the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara in the Hamarat region. Signatories to the Algiers peace agreement are also joining the fight.

We can see that the situation is also serious elsewhere in the region. The activities of Boko Haram cells and those of the Islamic State in West Africa, in particular, are exacerbating the worrisome situation in Nigeria and the Niger. The situation in Burkina Faso and Chad remains extremely unstable. In that context, it is worth recalling that the current high level of threats to security and stability in the Sahara-Sahel region is a direct consequence of Western countries' military intervention in Libya in 2011 and the subsequent collapse of Libyan statehood.

France's attempts to destabilize the Sahel have not borne fruit. Furthermore, the terrorist threat has increased as a result. On that note, we are not surprised to have heard the representative of France express concern about its inability to rectify the situation in the country. France has lost its post-colonial position, and as a result all it can do is pin the blame on someone else. Paris' intransigent unilateral actions, aimed at effecting regime change in Bamako, continue to cause significant damage to Africa's collective efforts to achieve stability in the Sahara-Sahel region. The most recent report of

the Secretary-General (S/2023/328), which we have all carefully read, includes information on the European Commission's decision to end the funding provided to the Joint Force by the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali for logistical and operational support.

We understand the reasons for Mali's withdrawal from the G-5 Sahel and its Joint Force. As a result, the political and military capacities of the Force have been significantly reduced. Against that backdrop, a complete overhaul of our approach to cooperation in the area of counter-terrorism is required, which we have not seen to date. We are convinced that the lead role in supporting peace and security in the Sahara-Sahel region should be played by the States of the region, with the tangible support of the international community. However, it is worth underscoring that the international assistance provided to the Sahel States should be based on the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of States, respect for national sovereignty and the principle of African solutions for African problems. The States of the Sahel should exercise full control — through actions, not words — over their decision-making in the fight against terrorism, because the security situation is hugely significant for every country in the region. When there is a terrorist threat, there are clear military responses that can be made to terrorist threats, and they should be swift. If bilateral agreements between the armed forces of the countries of the region are the most effective way to do that, we can only support them. In such situations, all political considerations, let alone geopolitical considerations, should take a back seat.

We commend the commitment of the leading regional associations, the African Union and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), to getting involved in the task of combating the terrorist threat in the Sahara-Sahel. What is important is moving from words to action as quickly as possible, and the decision at the ECOWAS summit in Abuja on 4 December 2022 to fast-track the mobilization of \$1 billion for the implementation of the ECOWAS 2020–2024 action plan on counter-terrorism was aimed at precisely that. Strengthening coordination among the region's peace and stability structures is a top priority.

Russia will continue to participate constructively, including as a permanent member of the Council, in the collective efforts to ensure security in the Sahara-Sahel region. We will also continue to provide bilateral support to the States in the region, including by building the

capacity of their armed forces, training their military and law-enforcement personnel and providing humanitarian assistance, as in the past. All of that engagement is perfectly legitimate and is welcomed by the countries of the region. However, we are not surprised by the repeated attempts to denigrate our efforts to provide assistance to Mali and other countries in the region. That now seems to have become a main theme of the statements delivered in the Council by the representatives of the United States, as well as a favourite topic of America's so-called free media. We deplore the impact of that on African States, including Mali — which is now facing serious challenges on all fronts, especially in the area of security.

Unfortunately, Western States are now using every possible lever at their disposal, including, very regrettably, the levers of the United Nations. In that regard, we consider the report by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) regarding the events in Moura in March 2022 to be yet another politically motivated attempt to discredit Mali's efforts to combat extremism. It creates the impression that instead of engaging directly with the Government of Mali, objectively and impartially, to establish the circumstances of what happened in Moura, the OHCHR obediently followed the lead of a number of countries that were demanding instant results. That undoubtedly affected the conduct of the fact-finding investigation, which relied on the testimony of unnamed witnesses and the proverbial tradition of "beyond a reasonable doubt". Not to mention the fact that none of the experts who prepared the report visited Moura in person. I ask my colleagues to carefully read the official comments of the Government of Mali on the report on the events in Moura. I urge them to respect the Malian authorities and wait for the results of their national investigation. Meanwhile, we will continue to provide assistance to Bamako, and we will never interfere in the internal affairs of Mali.

The President (*spoke in French*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of Switzerland.

I thank Assistant Secretary-General Pobee and Executive Secretary Tiaré for their briefings, as well as the Peacebuilding Commission for its written contribution. I also listened carefully to Ms. Diouf's very informative briefing and especially note her recommendation on the involvement of local communities.

As we have just heard — and as we read in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2023/328) — the countries of the Group of Five for the Sahel (G-5 Sahel) are facing multiple, interconnected and transnational challenges, not least of which are armed conflict, growing insecurity and the impacts of climate change. The response to the insecurity in the region over the past 10 years has mainly been security-focused, with a particular emphasis on the military front. However, it is clear that has not been enough to reduce or even contain the threat. We must therefore improve stability by working on the political, economic, social and environmental issues in the countries of the region. That requires a coherent political strategy that brings together three key measures.

First, conflict resolution and prevention must go hand in hand. Experience on the ground shows that if we are to end armed conflict, combat terrorism and prevent violent extremism, we must address the root causes and drivers of violence holistically. Young people must play a key role in that regard. They are not merely targets vulnerable to radicalization and recruitment by extremist groups, but partners in preventing radicalization and countering violent extremism. For example, young people build resilience in communities and facilitate post-trauma healing and reconciliation. They also play a key role in raising awareness and mobilizing local capacities. That numerically large and dynamic generation is ready to act for positive change. We have to empower them and give them opportunities to show leadership and make their voices heard.

Secondly, we must address the environmental and climate factors that affect stability in the Sahel. Climate change and extreme weather events have a significant impact on the quality and availability of natural resources. That is in addition to the destructive effects of conflict and the weak resilience and response capacity of institutions that are often fragile. Many mechanisms for conflict resolution, the management of natural resources

and the hosting of displaced persons exist at the local level. Those local experiences should be complemented by regional and international measures. Switzerland is aware of that and is committed to contributing to the resilience of the pastoral sector, including in Chad, Mali, Burkina Faso and the Niger. In Chad, Switzerland supports a programme that is helping to delay movements to the agricultural areas in the south of the country by three months, thereby reducing tensions between farmers and pastoralists in a sustainable way.

Thirdly, human rights and international humanitarian law in armed conflict must be respected, including during security operations, whether they are conducted by internal security forces or the G-5 Sahel Joint Force. We recognize the progress made by members of the Joint Force, in close collaboration with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, on the implementation of the human rights compliance framework and due diligence policy.

We need a collective effort to decisively carve out future responses to the security challenges in the Sahel. We therefore look forward with great interest to the strategic review of the Independent High-Level Panel on Security and Development in the Sahel, led by President Mahamadou Issoufou. The solution to these challenges lies in cooperation, not isolation. The actors in the region, including the members of the G-5 Sahel, must act together, supported by the international community and listening to local solutions, especially those proposed by young Africans — the engine of development on the continent.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers.

The meeting rose at 11.50 a.m.