



Security Council

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Identical letters dated 31 July 2024 from the Permanent Representative of Sierra Leone to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council

I am pleased to transmit for your attention the concept note for the Security Council briefing on the theme “Threats to international peace and security caused by terrorist acts in West Africa and the Sahel”, to be convened on 8 August 2024 by Sierra Leone in its capacity as President of the Council for the month of August 2024 (see annex).

I would be grateful if the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Michael Imran **Kanu**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative



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Concept note for the Security Council briefing on the theme “Threats to international peace and security caused by terrorist acts in West Africa and the Sahel”, to be held on 8 August 2024

Objectives

The briefing will provide an opportunity for Member States to explore concrete avenues for increased cooperation on non-military solutions to counter the threat of terrorism, with central Sahel and West African Member States currently most affected by the threat of terrorism, including cooperation on civilian protection initiatives. Through the sharing of context-specific strategies that have focused on community engagement, as well as tailored national capacity-building activities that have benefited practitioners locally in their fight against terrorism, Member States are expected to discuss ways of developing new partnerships to help leverage successful community resilience initiatives in tackling the root causes of terrorism.

The central Sahel and West African Member States currently most affected by the threat of terrorism will be given an opportunity to suggest areas where most support is needed and could be enhanced by greater collaborative regional and international action. It is hoped that concrete areas of intervention for strengthening needs-focused regional, inter-agency and cross-border cooperation will be identified.

Background

In West Africa and the Sahel, the continued escalation of terrorism creates concerns that “greater integration of terrorist groups in the region, and freedom of manoeuvre, raises the risk of a safe operating base developing from which they could project threat further, with implications for regional stability.”¹

The Security Council Arrria-formula meeting on the theme “Combating the rise of terrorism and violent extremism in West Africa and the Sahel”, convened by Sierra Leone on 19 June 2024, provided an opportunity to spotlight the recent rise in terrorism and violent extremism in the Sahel, as well as the need to focus on and address the root causes of this worrying trend. Member States acknowledged that, despite efforts, terrorism and violent extremism have continued to erode the social fabric, hamper economic and social development and destabilize entire regions of the African continent. Member States highlighted the urgent need to prioritize comprehensive, whole-of-society and whole-of-government solutions aimed at tackling the growing relationship of mutual confidence between terrorist groups and marginalized populations based on self-survival. While the root causes of terrorism and exacerbating conditions are well known, pragmatic and tailored responses, focusing on local specificity, that could be implemented in the current socioeconomic context are lacking.

According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), as at June 2024, 3,125,192 individuals from Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania and the Niger have been displaced, including 2,616,570 internally displaced persons and 508,622 refugees.²

¹ See S/2024/92.

² IOM, “Situation in central Sahel, Liptako Gourma and coastal countries”, monthly dashboard No. 50, July 2024. Available at www.dtm.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd11461/files/reports/LGC%20-%20June%202024%20%28EN%29.pdf.

According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR),³ in Mauritania only, as at April 2024, the deteriorating subregional security situation, combined with other economic, political and climate factors, forced 230,000 people to cross the Malian border and seek refuge in the border areas. The number of refugees and asylum seekers surpasses the 190,000 members of the host community, putting additional strain on limited local resources and creating risks of inter-community violence. In Burkina Faso, internal displacement has surpassed 2 million and an increasing number of people have fled towards Mali and the Gulf of Guinea countries, namely, Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Togo.

As the reported lack of coordinated regional responses in West Africa “increases the risk of further terrorist expansion in the central Sahel region”,⁴ the briefing would allow Member States to share views and proposals on addressing structural drivers such as the absence of State institutions and social safety nets for border communities, the lack of employment opportunities for youth and the scarcity of natural resources, further impacted by climate change. Member States should also share good practices on non-kinetic counter-terrorism measures, from countering violent extremism, border control management, countering the financing of terrorism and judicial cooperation, to bringing terrorists to justice and the handling of former terrorists and their associates. Cross-border-related issues, exacerbated by porous borders, require effective cooperation and coordination among key government stakeholders, ranging from the police, intelligence services and the military to justice, as well as with local communities. Current national policy responses still suffer from limited community engagement, often due to a lack of awareness of those policies within communities. Also, underresourced government and security personnel are unable to effectively engage with relevant entities at the community level.

Proposals for renewed regional partnerships and cooperation between the United Nations and regional and subregional groups in the fight against terrorism should be advanced. The Secretary-General’s policy brief on A New Agenda for Peace (A/77/CRP.1/Add.8) reflects on these vulnerabilities and the changing landscape in conflict dynamics and encourages Member States to move beyond the current logic of competition and find avenues for cooperation and collective action to pursue shared interests. Similarly, through its unanimous adoption of resolution 2719 (2023), the Security Council recognized the changing nature of conflicts in Africa and the need to be able to draw on a range of international responses and their complementarity to address the increasing use of asymmetric tactics by terrorists and violent extremists, as well as the sophistication of violent extremism conducive to terrorism.

The briefing offers Member States the opportunity to exchange concrete ideas on ways to enhance cooperation on cross-border joint efforts to help Member States better address known vulnerabilities and better protect their populations and respect their fundamental human rights.

³ UNHCR, “Plan de réponse pour les réfugiés maliens en Mauritanie 2024” (2024). Available in French only at <https://reporting.unhcr.org/mauritania-refugee-response-plan-malian-refugees-french>.

⁴ United Nations, “Lack of coordinated regional responses in West Africa ‘increases risk of further terrorist expansion in central Sahel region’, delegate tells Security Council”, press release, 12 July 2024.

Guiding questions

1. How can active cooperation between government stakeholders and local communities be further enhanced to better address the key drivers leading to violent extremism and terrorism? What additional tools and support could contribute to achieving far-reaching impact for the local population?
2. What practical measures could be taken to hamper the increasing cross-border issues caused by terrorist-related activities, resulting in significant movements of populations and creating additional strain on already limited local resources, which could constitute potential drivers of violent extremism?
3. How could a new approach to subregional and international cooperation with Sahel and West African States materialize to better tackle the scourge of terrorism, especially its root causes, while taking into account local communities' aspirations?

Date and venue

The briefing will be held on 8 August 2024 at 10 a.m. at United Nations Headquarters, in the Security Council Chamber.

Participation

This will be a meeting with participation limited to Security Council members and Member States from the West African and the Sahel region. Interpretation will be provided in the official languages of the United Nations.

Briefers

1. Under-Secretary-General of the Office of Counter-Terrorism
 2. Assistant Secretary-General and Executive Director of the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate
 3. Acting Director of the African Centre for the Study and Research on Terrorism, Idriss Mounir Lallali
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