

THE DEPUTY SECRETARY-GENERAL
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REMARKS ON THE SITUATION IN THE SAHEL
AT INFORMAL JOINT MEETING OF THE FAO
COUNCIL,
IFAD EXECUTIVE BOARD AND WFP
EXECUTIVE BOARD

Rome, 13 September 2019

Excellencies,

Colleagues and friends,

I welcome your focus on the Sahel, its opportunity and its challenges. Given my familiarity with the region [and my visit there last year], I am also grateful for this opportunity to share some reflections on this region.

Despite its enormous potential and abundant resources, the Sahel region faces enormous security, institutional, governance and economic challenges that impede progress towards lasting peace and sustainable development.

It is our collective responsibility as an international community to support the governments of the Sahel countries as they strive to address the root causes of the crisis and create a path towards peace and prosperity.

In this context, the holistic implementation of the UN Integrated Strategy for the Sahel remains a priority. Approved by the Security Council in 2013, the Strategy takes

a preventive, integrated and concerted approach to strengthening governance, security and resilience.

Six years after its launch, the objectives are still valid and will continue to guide UN action in the region. However, the situation is dynamic and rapidly evolving, requiring an urgent and responsive approach by the international community.

With that in mind, last year the Secretary-General gave new impetus to the strategy by adopting the Sahel Support Plan, an inclusive document based on the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda and the 2063 Agenda of the African Union.

The plan strives to bring better coordination and coherence to supporting the 10 countries in focus. While progress has been made in pulling together the different UN entities, we must do more to improve coordination and

collaboration amongst other actors and strengthen national leadership.

Solutions to the problems in the Sahel region will only be sustainable when driven by local, national and regional actors, with external partners supporting these efforts, as needed.

The strategy's governance pillar involves, for example, the critical support of MINUSMA, the UN Peacekeeping Operation in Mali, for the implementation of the Peace and Reconciliation Agreement. It also entails support for the Burkinabe authorities in establishing a national mechanism to promote local conflict prevention and resolution and to forestall any further degradation of inter-community relations and social cohesion in the country.

The security pillar includes the strengthening of security institutions and the fight against violent extremism. MINUSMA is actively supporting the G5 Sahel Joint Force to

become fully operational. The Joint Force is a critical part of security responses to defeat extremist armed groups and respond to the many cross-border challenges facing the Sahel, including trafficking in persons, illicit goods, weapons and drugs; migration; and displacement. Meanwhile, MINUSMA is stepping up its ability to protect civilians in central Mali, in support of the authorities' efforts.

Every day we are reminded of the plight of the people of the Sahel, especially its poorest groups, women and young people, who fear for their safety and cannot access health services, education or other services essential for lives of dignity. National budgets for defense and public security have risen sharply in recent years, constraining development budgets and social spending, with all-too-predictable consequences.

The surge in herder-farmer conflicts in the region in the last few years is one example of the increased threat of conflict arising from climate change, and one of the region's most pressing security challenges. In this regard, the UN is closely analyzing the rise in farmer-herder conflict, in order to promote holistic and sustainable solutions. ECOWAS has

convened experts in the region and produced a report that looks at the root causes and possible solutions to the crisis.

The climate resilience and sustainable agriculture pillar of the strategy aims to create sustainable livelihood prospects for the vulnerable populations of the Sahel including, women, farmers, pastoralists and fishermen alike, especially for the youth.

The programme focuses on three key areas:

- (i) Improved food security and nutrition through restoration of degraded land and sustainable management of natural resources in Agro-Sylvo-Pastoral and Fishing systems,**
- (ii) Efficient and diversified value chains enhancing access to profitable markets for smallholder farmers and vulnerable households,**
- (iii) Enhanced resilience of livelihoods through de-risking instruments, disaster risk reduction practices and integrated food security and**

nutrition programmes that will make it possible to transform economies positively, improve the living conditions of the population and give hope to young people.

Four fully developed initiatives from the Support Plan on the Sahel have been activated in key areas such as governance, energy, sustainable agriculture and resilience.

The United Nations will need more than \$1 billion to implement these programmes, and securing these resources will continue to be a significant challenge.

Among these initiatives, 9 billion euros will be allocated over the period 2019-2023 by the 12 members of the Alliance for the Sahel, in line with the priorities of the G5's Sahel Priority Investment Programme and the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel.

Colleagues,

Beyond these specifics, a further major challenge is to change the general perception of the Sahel region to fully capitalize on its economic assets and potential, particularly with respect to renewable energies. There is no denying the serious problems and trends. But having visited recently, I

saw many positive examples of what people and groups are doing.

And knowing the broader region as I do, I can assure you that there is great commitment, energy, entrepreneurship, and more, all of which can be the basis for a better future.

Let us all do our part to support and nurture what we know is possible.

Thank you.