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The Call of the Sahel: A global response meeting series on counter-terrorism

Addressing environmental degradation and its effects in the proliferation of terrorism

Thursday 13 October 2022, 16:00 – 18:00
Room AD 10, ground floor, KCC

Concept Note

1. Introduction

Despite global efforts to counter terrorism and violent extremism, the Sahel region continues to face a deteriorating situation that has reached unprecedented levels in recent years. It threatens not only the people of the Sahel, but also the statehood of the region's countries. The Sahel has become a hotspot for the refuge and redeployment of networks of terrorist groups and organized crime. This, along with other social, political, economic, environmental and ideological challenges, impedes the region and neighbouring countries from achieving peace and security. The challenges facing the Sahel today require an effective counter-terrorism strategy within a multidimensional approach, and a greater focus on preventative measures.

Following the First Global Parliamentary Summit on Counter-Terrorism (September 2021, Vienna, Austria), a joint declaration – the *Call of the Sahel* – was published, and a Plan of Action was developed. The Plan foresees a series of five meetings, which collectively respond to the various challenges facing the Sahel. Each meeting will consider one of five key areas where support is needed for an effective and sustainable counter-terrorism strategy: environment, community, security, education and development. The meetings will consider each area through the lens of human, state and regional concerns.

The ultimate goal of the five meetings is to generate recommendations specific to each area. These will be presented at a global summit in 2023 – *The Global Response to the Call of the Sahel*. Following the summit, the recommendations will be translated into activities which, when implemented, will contribute to an increase in the human development of the people of the Sahel, a decrease in the prevalence of terrorism and organized crime, and greater international attention on the needs and challenges of the Sahel region. The target will be to have sustainable parliamentary monitoring, coordination and evaluation mechanism that supports global efforts to protect the Sahel countries based on the needs of the region's people.

2. Background

For the past 20 years, the global parliamentary community has paid special attention to terrorism, and since 1996, the IPU has adopted 12 resolutions related to that topic. They have all highlighted the need for cooperation with relevant United Nations agencies to support the implementation of UN resolutions and strategies, including the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. IPU Member Parliaments unanimously adopted a resolution that promoted this Strategy and committed to providing the legislative support required for the implementation of relevant UN resolutions.

Since 2016, the IPU has increased its efforts to raise global awareness about the victims of terrorism. At the 137th IPU Assembly (St. Petersburg, Russia, October 2017), Member Parliaments endorsed the establishment of the parliamentary High-Level Advisory Group on Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism (HLAG). It was designed to be the global focal point for parliamentary counter-terrorism efforts. The HLAG comprises members of parliament with relevant knowledge and experience. HLAG's establishment led to the creation of the IPU Programme on Countering Terrorism and Preventing Violent Extremism. HLAG members identified the Sahel as an important area of focus.

In September 2021, the IPU organized the First Global Parliamentary Summit on Counter-Terrorism in Vienna, Austria. At the Summit, parliamentarians discussed how to build pathways to peace, and a better future for the victims of terrorism, with a special focus on the Sahel. The Summit's deliberations resulted in the *Call of the Sahel*, a joint declaration in which parliamentarians called for peace and sustainable development in the Sahel to be supported. A joint parliamentary bloc was established to coordinate the work of the Call. The bloc includes the IPU, the Arab Parliament, the Inter-Parliamentary Committee of the G5 Sahel, and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean. It also cooperates closely with the UN Office on Drugs and Crime. The bloc's aim is to achieve concrete results by assisting and supporting the Sahel countries through a holistic approach.

In 2021, the IPU developed a new strategy to guide its activities for the period 2022–2026. The strategy's ultimate goal is to develop parliamentary ecosystems for democracy. The *Call of the Sahel* was drafted in the spirit of the new strategy. It prioritizes all the key policy areas identified by the strategy, including: peace and security; democracy, human rights, gender equality and youth participation; climate change; and sustainable development for all. The ecosystem approach means that the IPU will focus on engaging with a wide array of stakeholders who influence parliaments, parliamentarians and their broader societies. It remains a priority to ensure that activities are driven by the needs of the Sahel and by voices from the region.

3. Thematic focus, objectives and methodology

Based on the Ecological Threat Report of the Institute for Economics and Peace, the Sahel is one of the most fragile regions due to ecological, social and political shocks. Six of the ten countries in the Sahel are classified as ecological hotspots (Chad, Cameroon, Guinea, Mauritania, Niger and Nigeria). According to the Threat Report, an ecological hotspot is an area at high risk of exposure to ecological threats and low levels of socioeconomic resilience¹.

In addition to ecological stress, the Sahel faces civil unrest, weak institutions, corruption, high population growth and lack of adequate food and water. The lack of institutions and good governance in the region's countries exacerbates the problem even further. This results in disputes between local communities and other groups over resources, higher risk of conflict and the rise of Islamist insurgencies.

Security implications may be driven by natural disasters, resource scarcity and ethnic tensions. Desertification in the Sahel contributes to land scarcity which together with over-population, and the overuse of resources have contributed to the decrease of arable land cutting vital agricultural practices and livestock presence, which are essential for the sustainability of the population. Frequent droughts and floods have also undermined food production in the region, destroying diverse human settlements and causing widespread displacement and conflict between local communities and rebel groups. South Sudan is an example of how several interconnected environmental and conflict-related factors have led to famine (85% of people struggle to find food every day) and the displacement of 1.47 million people.

¹ www.visionofhumanity.org/maps/ecological-threat-register-2021/#/

The above instability also fosters an increased threat posed by terrorists to environment-related critical infrastructure. Dams, water pipes, irrigation systems, farms and ultimately farmers could be targeted and easily fall victim to terrorist action.

The fragile socio-economic factors and the need for the population to migrate contribute to criminal practices such as human trafficking and smuggling and ultimately create favourable conditions for radicalization and terrorist recruitment.

The UN Security Council has since 2007 discussed the links between climate change and insecurity and these links are increasingly recognized. In March 2017, the Security Council adopted resolution 2349 on the need to address climate-related risks to tackle the conflict in the Lake Chad basin and in July 2018 a debate was held on "Understanding and addressing climate-related security risks".

On another note, the exploitation by terrorists of natural resources has also been a topic of increased interest within the international community. In June 2022, the Counter-Terrorism Executive Directorate of the UN Security Council published a Trends Alert on "Concerns over the use of proceeds from the exploitation, trade, and trafficking of natural resources for terrorism financing".

The Ecological Threat Report indicates a cyclical relationship between conflict and ecological degradation. Resource scarcity may lead to conflict, while the conflict itself may cause further resource degradation. For ecological hotspots such as the Sahel, the low levels of socioeconomic resilience point to the region's existing lack of stability. Ecological degradation may emphasize instability or weaken other socioeconomic dimensions further. For instance, rapid population growth and food insecurity have increased socio-political tensions in sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East for the past 50 years. While ecological resource management and socioeconomic resilience are necessary to break this cycle, it is also essential to address the implications of conflict through a security approach.

The proliferation of terrorism in the Sahel has a multitude of underlying causes. While they may not be causes for terrorism on their own, climate change and environmental degradation are key factors for understanding the rise of terrorism across the Sahel in recent years. The following are some of the ways in which environmental degradation can become a destabilizing factor for Sahelian communities:

- Natural disasters such as droughts and floods put pressure on the livelihoods of Sahel inhabitants, and lead to increased poverty and violence;
- The natural disasters cause food security crises that lead people to turn towards armed groups and illegal activities to sustain themselves and their families;
- The Sahel is particularly vulnerable to changing weather patterns, which increases the probability of natural disasters;
- Temperatures in the Sahel have risen 50% more than the global average; the effects of climate change and desertification are felt more acutely in the Sahel than in other regions;
- Desertification continually expands the borders of the Sahara, pushing populations towards more fertile areas, increasing the pressure on local resources, and driving conflict;
- Desertification and greater pressures on food, water and grazing lands are factors that drive interethnic conflict, leading groups to join terrorist organizations for protection;
- Over-farming due to increased population or incorrect farming methods can lead to a depletion of minerals in the topsoil, and further exacerbate erosion and desertification, leading to a loss of already-scarce fertile lands.

The panel discussion, *addressing environmental degradation and its effects on the proliferation of terrorism*, will bring together parliamentarians, as well as experts on security, the environment and climate change. Specialists from think tanks and relevant UN organizations will be invited to present their ideas on how to tackle the region's environmental issues. Participants will then formulate recommendations to be presented at the summit, the *Global Response to the Call of the Sahel*.

The panel discussion will address two of the strategic objectives in the 2022–2026 IPU strategy: *building effective and empowered parliaments*; and *catalysing collective parliamentary action*. Discussions will focus on supporting the parliaments of the Sahel, as they have been identified as key actors in representing and protecting citizens' rights. By strengthening their role, parliaments

will be able to carry out their mandate more effectively. Collective parliamentary action also lies at the core of the *Call of the Sahel*. The Call will be guided by a joint secretariat composed of the IPU and various regional parliamentary organizations.

Due to the wide variety of stakeholders involved and the complexity of the issue, a preparatory phase will lead up to the panel discussion. This will consist of:

- (1) An internal coordination meeting of the IPU secretariat, members of the parliamentary bloc, relevant UN agencies and the Institute for Economics and Peace. Panel participants will be identified. Guiding questions will be developed and then shared with the participants.
- (2) A second meeting for representatives of all organizations attending the panel discussion. The meeting will allow responses to be debated and condensed into draft recommendations, which will then be discussed at the conference.

4. Structure

The panel discussion will be coordinated by Ambassador Mokhtar Omar.

The following panellists will intervene:

Mr. Karim Darwesh (member of the HLAG, Egyptian MP)
Mr. Serge Stroobants (Director, Europe and MENA, Institute for Economics and Peace);
Mr. Tankoano Norbert (Executive Secretary of the Interparliamentary Committee of the G5 Sahel)
Expert from the Terrorism Prevention Branch, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
Expert from the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change secretariat.

5. Date and venue

The panel will take place on 13 October 2022, from 16:00 to 18:00, as a side event of the 145th IPU Assembly in Kigali, Rwanda. The venue will be room AD 10, ground floor, Kigali Convention Centre.

6. Outcomes

The panel discussion recommendations will be presented at the Global Summit. They will address questions such as:

- What are the leading factors causing environmental degradation and desertification in the Sahel?
- What is the effect of climate change on ecological degradation?
- What is the role of environmental degradation in the proliferation of terrorism and the creation of power vacuums?
- What types of projects are the international community developing to address climate change and environmental degradation in the Sahel? What more can be done?
- What measures can be taken to slow or prevent desertification and other types of environmental degradation?
- What support do governments and communities need to tackle these issues?
- How can communities manage increased pressure on their resources?
- How can governments manage intercommunal tensions arising from increased pressure on natural resources?
- How can States better manage migration stemming from desertification?
- How can we assess the impact of different activities being implemented?
- What coordination mechanisms are in place between different stakeholders?
- How can the international community address the extreme food and water insecurity in the Sahel?
- What can be done to make Sahelian societies more resilient to environmental degradation, natural disasters, and violence?
- How can the Sahel build stronger communities?

7. Contact details

For any general or specific enquiries, please contact the Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism Programme at; counter-terrorism@ipu.org please all your request copy to: ct-assistant@ipu.org