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The Call of the Sahel: a global response Meeting series on countering terrorism

*Engaging communities in the prevention of violent extremism and
addressing the conditions conducive to terrorism*

26-27 February, Algiers, Algeria

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, security and prosperity. 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 the Second Global Parliamentary Summit on Counter-Terrorism (2023, exact dates and venue TBC) – *The Global Response to the Call of the Sahel*. Following the Summit, the recommendations will be translated into activities which have been developed based on consultation with the people of the Sahel. When implemented, these activities 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. A sustainable parliamentary monitoring, coordination and evaluation mechanism that supports global efforts to protect the Sahel countries will also be established.

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 the relevant United Nations organizations in order to support the implementation of UN 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.



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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 activities. 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

Community-related subjects will be considered at the second meeting in this series. The focus will be on *engaging communities in the prevention of violent extremism and addressing the conditions conducive to terrorism*. The meeting will aim to shed light on the impact of violent extremism on communities, and the role that different stakeholders can play in tackling the conditions conducive to terrorism. The project uses a working definition for "community" from the Cambridge Dictionary: "*the people living in one particular area or people who are considered as a unit because of their common interests, social group, or nationality*". The meeting will further adapt this definition for the context of the Sahel.

The proliferation of terrorism in the Sahel has multiple underlying causes, many of which are felt by local communities, and which will require differing responses, including:

- Ethno-religious or tribal divides being used as recruitment tools for terrorist organizations;
- Religious and community leaders being recruited, intimidated or coerced;
- Terrorist groups increasing recruitment of vulnerable groups, such as women and children, and the need to adopt age and gender-sensitive approaches to efficiently respond to such evolving threats;
- Terrorist groups systematically targeting border communities either for recruitment or intimidation purposes, to gain control of border areas;
- Climate change, poverty and lack of economic opportunities forcing young men and women to turn to radical or criminal organizations in order to support their families, especially as the Sahel has one of the highest birth rates in the world;



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- Growing resentment and deterioration of trust in the authorities, due to a lack of government services and the ineffectiveness of the executive, legislative and judicial branches of government, a gap which terrorist groups abuse by offering various services (security, employment opportunities, education, etc.) to local communities;
- Government actors using *divide and rule* tactics to provoke intergroup conflict;
- Failure to implement peace accords, the erosion of the rule of law, and a lack of access to justice variously leading people to take justice into their own hands, and form or join armed groups for self-defence;
- Mismanaged counter-terrorism efforts being used against certain communities;
- Enhancing communication between communities and government agencies and establishing early-warning mechanisms and platforms to identify methods of radicalization and recruitment used by terrorist groups, at the earliest stages.

The two-day meeting will bring together members of the IPU HLAG, parliamentarians from the Sahel region, religious and community leaders, the United Nations, members of regional parliamentary assemblies, victims of terrorism, formerly radicalized people, representatives of civil society and non-government organizations, and subject-matter experts. The meeting will employ a participatory approach to ensure that key local stakeholders, especially parliamentarians and people of the Sahel region, have the central role in deliberations to identify and understand the challenges facing communities and the broader region, as well as in the development of recommendations.

The objective of the meeting will be to identify the needs of the Sahel's communities in order to promote resilience to radicalization, and address the conditions under which terrorism thrives or declines. Participants will especially consider the nexus between communities and their authorities (including parliaments) to identify opportunities for effective cooperation to establish prevention measures. In this regard, the identification of community leaders – e.g. religious or tribal leaders – and good practices is key. The issue of *lack of trust in authorities* will also be addressed as an important area of intervention. Participants will consider trust-building measures as a basic prerequisite for parliamentarians and authorities to be able to engage with communities meaningfully. The meeting will give special attention to several important social groups and stakeholders, including:

- *Children and youth*, who are particularly vulnerable to radicalization;
- *Women*, who are vulnerable as victims of terrorism and violent extremism, susceptible to radicalization and key drivers of deradicalization, especially within the home;
- *Local politicians*, who are important stakeholders for translating needs into policy and facilitating sustainable change.

Participants will formulate recommendations to be presented at the summit, *The Global Response to the Call of the Sahel*. Due to the complexity of the various drivers of insecurity in the Sahel region, it is understood that this community approach to the Sahel, and the recommendations it produces, are to be read in combination with recommendations emerging from the other four meetings, which will be discussed at the Global Summit.

The community meeting 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 is guided by a joint secretariat composed of the IPU and various regional parliamentary organizations. The meeting views community engagement as a regional challenge and is set to expand this group of stakeholders even further so as to engage with the broader parliamentary ecosystem.



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

- 1) An internal coordination meeting of the IPU Secretariat, members of the parliamentary bloc and the UN Office on Drugs and Crime. 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 meeting. The meeting will allow responses to be debated and condensed into draft recommendations, which will then be discussed at the meeting.

4. Date and venue

The meeting will take place in the Abdelatif Rahal International Conference Center in Algiers, Algeria, from 26 to 27 February, 2023. It is organised jointly in collaboration with the Honourable National People's Assembly of Algeria.

5. Outcomes

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

- What methods are terrorist groups employing to recruit or keep members?
- What makes individuals vulnerable to radicalization?
- What theological narrative underlies the rhetoric of extremist organizations?
- What measures are being taken to prevent violent extremism or address the root causes of radicalization?
- How can we assess the impact of different interventions focused on development, preventing violent extremism or counter-terrorism that are being implemented?
- What coordination mechanisms are in place between different stakeholders?
- What support is needed to strengthen communities, civil society and institutions?
- How can communities of particular vulnerability – such as women, children and youth – or utility – such as politicians – be adequately supported and protected?
- What kind of measures can be taken to facilitate trust-building between communities and authorities?
- How can different stakeholders collaborate to promote citizenship, the rule of law and statehood?
- What will be needed in future to prevent violent extremism and address the root causes of radicalization?

6. Contact details

For any general or specific enquiries, please contact the Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism Programme at counter-terrorism@ipu.org

We recommend keeping ct-assistant@ipu.org cc'd in all correspondence.

For questions about community-related topics, please contact interfaith@ipu.org.