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146th IPU Assembly

Manama (11–15 March 2023)

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

Mitigating the impact of security threats *by building resilience in The Sahel*

Saturday, 11 March 2023, from 14:30 to 17:30
Grand Hall E (EWB)

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 to discuss the various challenges facing the Sahel to consider the five key areas where support is needed for an effective and sustainable counter-terrorism strategy. These include: the environment (debated at the 145th IPU Assembly), community (debated in Algeria) security, education and development. Each area will be considered through the lens of human, state and regional concerns.

The aim of these meetings is to generate recommendations specific to each area to be presented at the Second Global Parliamentary Summit on Countering Terrorism in 2023. Following the Summit, the recommendations will be translated into activities to accelerate the human development of the people of the Sahel, decrease the prevalence of terrorism and organized crime, and draw greater international attention to the needs and challenges of the Sahel region. The ultimate aim is to have sustainable parliamentary monitoring, coordination and evaluation mechanisms to support the 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. The resolutions highlight 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. The 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 and at the 137th IPU Assembly, Member Parliaments endorsed the establishment of the parliamentary High-Level Advisory Group on Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism (HLAG) as the global focal point for parliamentary counter-terrorism efforts. The HLAG, which is comprised of members of parliament with relevant knowledge and experience, helped create the IPU Programme on Countering Terrorism and 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 outcome was a joint declaration, the *Call of the Sahel (The Call)*, where parliamentarians call for support to peace and sustainable development in the Sahel. A joint parliamentary bloc was established to coordinate the work of *The Call*. The bloc includes the IPU, the Arab Parliament (AP), the Inter-Parliamentary Committee of the G5 Sahel (CIP G5 Sahel), and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean (PAM). It also cooperates closely with the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). The bloc's aim is to achieve concrete results by assisting and supporting the Sahel countries through a holistic approach.

The Call was drafted in the spirit of the IPU's 2022-2026 Strategy which aimed at developing parliamentary ecosystems for democracy. As such, it prioritizes all the key policy areas identified by said 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. *The Call's* priority is to ensure that activities are driven by the needs of the Sahel and by voices from the region.

Since 2001, the United Nations has adopted numerous legal instruments, including the 2006 United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy (GCTS) (A/RES/60/288) and its review resolutions, specifying that legislative reviews are essential to support the global efforts to counter and prevent terrorism. In the most recent GCTS review resolution 75/291, adopted on 30 June 2021, the General Assembly called upon Member States, the United Nations and other appropriate international, regional and subregional organizations to step up their efforts to implement the Strategy in an integrated and balanced manner and in all its aspects.

In addition, since 1963, the international community has developed 19 international conventions and protocols and adopted a series of United Nations Security Council resolutions related to terrorism. Combined, these legal instruments comprise what is commonly referred to as the universal legal framework against terrorism.

The limited adherence to these instruments and their limited incorporation into national legislation has often led to inadequacy when investigating, prosecuting and adjudicating terrorism. Consequently, States are often not prepared to effectively tackle terrorist threats, bring terrorists to justice and cooperate with other States in line with the double criminality principle and human rights standards.

The UNODC Strategic Vision for Africa 2030 calls for the development of stronger partnerships to accelerate levels of effort and take transformative action to support Africa's people, especially the most vulnerable, along with its governments and institutions.

With the aim of helping Member States in the Sahel to overcome these challenges, UNODC developed tailored technical assistance programmes addressing specific areas of vulnerabilities to terrorist threats that affect the efficient response of the criminal justice systems in those countries. UNODC provides specialized technical assistance to countries in the region including with regard to countering the use of the Internet for terrorist purposes, enhancing the capacity of specialized criminal justice and law enforcement officials to investigate, prosecute and adjudicate terrorism-related offences, addressing the challenges related to foreign terrorist fighters and returnees, collecting admissible evidence from the battlefield through the cooperation of first responders, and promoting judicial cooperation and mutual legal assistance.

3. Thematic focus, objectives and methodology

Terrorism has become the main source of instability in the Sahel. The proliferation of terrorism and its spread is spurred by many factors such as geopolitical turmoil caused by civil wars in neighboring countries, the present violent extremism, poverty, lack of education and the destruction of the environment. *The Call*, which focuses primarily on the security of the region, also recognizes the need to target all factors that contribute to the growing instability citizens face. In addition to its traditional meaning, in this context, “security” also incorporates elements such as human security, statehood and the rule of Law, which are the foundations of a strong state. *The Call* opted for this broader meaning because the over-relied on “hard security” approach, which might win in the battlefield, cannot prevent the social problems that are at the root of the violence.

Human security is a people-centered holistic approach that seeks to protect human rights determined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights¹ such as, the right to life, to be presumed innocent, the right to stand trial before a free court, and the banning of slavery, the slave trade and torture. These rights are seriously at risk in the Sahel, either because of the immediate threat of violence suffered by the population, or because of the disintegration of the rule of law and of statehood.

To provide security and protect the rule of law, a state’s security apparatus must be strengthened. Therefore, the statehood as well as the material and organizational capacity to counter terrorism and violent extremism of the Sahel countries must be reinforced. This would help protect their borders from armed groups and increase their reach to their respective communities. Also, security structures must operate in keeping with their mandates to reduce collateral damage among civilians. In the Sahel, trust between civilians and the military is low due to heavy-handed operations which can further radicalize civilians which leads again to further heavy-handed operations creating thus a vicious circle.

The Libyan civil war further destabilized the region and increased pressure in regions that were already difficult to govern. The already vulnerable societies of the Sahel faced increasing pressure from armed groups. With the increase in violence governance structures deteriorated which fueled a crisis in the social fabric of the Sahel countries. With the security crises citizens increasingly lost trust in their governments leading to coups in many countries of the region. The coups have led to international isolation in certain cases and to the discontinuation of security strategies and regional initiatives to deal with the crises. This situation in a region where most armed groups operate across borders has further reduced the scope for regional cooperation.

To understand the security situation, the key local players operating in the Sahel must be looked at. These include national security and police forces, terrorist groups, organized crime, separatist groups, as well as local militias that have been formed for the protection of their communities.

Despite a number of regional and international security forces on the ground, attempts by the international community to improve the situation in the Sahel have not been successful so far. To achieve lasting results on the ground that are felt by the citizens of the Sahel, and in keeping with its 2022-2026 Strategy, the IPU aims to strengthen the ability of Member Parliaments in the region to act in accordance with their budgeting, legislation and oversight roles. Parliaments are the main democratic forces in the region and, as representatives of the people, can bring meaningful change.

This panel discussion will bring together parliamentarians, relevant UN organizations, representatives of civil society organizations and experts on security to present their ideas on how to tackle the region’s security issues. Participants will then formulate recommendations to be presented at the Second Global Parliamentary Summit on Countering Terrorism.

The panel discussion will address two of the strategic objectives in the IPU 2022–2026 Strategy: building effective and empowered parliaments; and catalyzing collective parliamentary action. Discussions will focus on collectively supporting the parliaments of the Sahel as they are the key actors in representing and protecting citizens’ rights. By strengthening their role, the Sahel parliaments will be able to carry out their mandate more effectively. In addition, *The Call* is guided by a joint secretariat composed of the IPU and various regional parliamentary organizations.

¹ <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>

4. Date and venue

The panel will take place on 11 March 2023, from 14:30 to 17:30 as a side event of the 146th IPU Assembly in Manama, Bahrain.

5. Outcomes

The panel discussion recommendations will be presented at the Second Global Parliamentary Summit on Countering Terrorism. They will address questions such as:

- What is the role of parliaments and parliamentarians in transforming the security situation in the Sahel?
- How can parliaments use their roles of budgeting, legislation and oversight to strengthen the security apparatus in their respective countries?
- How can parliamentary oversight of the armed forces be improved in order to prevent collateral damage against civilians which can lead to further radicalization?
- How can the international community do more to strengthen the states of the Sahel while avoiding previous mistakes?
- What pilot projects can be put in place to bring peace to the Sahel? Where should they be located? What should their focus be?
- How can security structures and systems be strengthened for more effectiveness on the ground? What needs to be addressed in their recruitment and training, motivation and incentives to enable more effective operations?
- How can civilians and communities affected by violence be better integrated into security responses to enhance their effectiveness and increase trust levels?
- How can we enhance coordination between security actors and others working on the causes of insecurity?
- What support do governments and communities need to tackle the rise in violence and the deteriorating security situation?
- How can states better manage forced displacement and refugees in this region?
- How can we assess the real impact of the different activities being implemented?
- What coordination mechanisms are in place between different stakeholders?
- What can be done to make Sahelian societies more resilient to threats of security and violence?
- What do governments need in order to effectively control their territories and guarantee security to their populations?

6. Contact details

For any general or specific enquiries, please contact the IPU Programme on Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism at <mailto:counter-terrorism@ipu.org>, cc'd to ct-assistant@ipu.org in all correspondence.