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Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel

Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution [2391 \(2017\)](#) of 8 December 2017, in which the Council requested me, in close coordination with the States members of the Group of Five for the Sahel (G-5 Sahel) (Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and the Niger) and the African Union, to report on the activities of the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel. It provides an update since my previous report of 12 November 2018 ([S/2018/1006](#)) on progress in the operationalization of the Joint Force, international support for the Force, the implementation of the technical agreement between the United Nations, the European Union and G-5 Sahel States, challenges encountered by the Joint Force, possible measures for further consideration and the implementation by the G-5 Sahel States of a human rights and international humanitarian law compliance framework.

2. The Joint Force resumed operations in January 2019, following a six-month hiatus after the complex attack on its headquarters in Sévaré, Mali, in June 2018. It attained 75 per cent operational capacity, but ongoing equipment and training shortfalls hamper its full operationalization. In accordance with resolution [2391 \(2017\)](#), States members of G-5 Sahel continued their efforts to generate outstanding troops and equipment, assisted by the European Union coordination hub and with the support of partners and donors. Further steps were taken in the operationalization of the police component and the establishment of the human rights and international humanitarian law compliance framework, with the support of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

II. Political, security and humanitarian developments

3. On 28 January, the Defence and Security Committee of G-5 Sahel convened its seventh ordinary session in Niamey. The chiefs of defence staff of the States members of G-5 Sahel discussed the status of the operationalization of the Joint Force and issued recommendations for the meeting of ministers of defence and ministers for foreign affairs of the G-5 Sahel countries on 3 February in Ouagadougou. The Council of Ministers of the Group recommended to enter into further negotiations with the United Nations and the European Union to revise the technical agreement signed on 23 February 2018 in order to assess the possibility of broadening the scope of support



provided by the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) to the Joint Force.

4. On 5 February, the Heads of State of G-5 Sahel held their annual summit in Ouagadougou. They discussed the deteriorating security situation and the delays in the operationalization of the Joint Force. In this regard, they called for the rapid disbursement of pledges made by international donors and partners, urged the Group's Council of Ministers to speed up the operationalization of the G-5 police academy in Koundoul, Chad, and called for the transfer of the Sahelian Threat Analysis and Early Warning Centre from Nouakchott to Ouagadougou. The Heads of State further instructed the Council of Ministers to roll out the G-5 Sahel Priority Investment Programme and to accelerate the establishment of a Sahel regional airline. The President of Burkina Faso, Roch Marc Christian Kaboré, assumed the presidency of the Conference of Heads of State of G-5 Sahel for one year, taking over from the President of the Niger, Mahamadou Issoufou.

5. Overall, the security situation in the Sahel continued to deteriorate, having spillover effects on neighbouring countries that are not members of G-5 Sahel, including Benin, Côte d'Ivoire and Togo.

6. In Mali, French forces, in cooperation with Malian defence and security forces, reportedly eliminated a number of jihadist figures, including the leader of the so-called "Emirate of Timbuktu", Yahia Abou el Hammam, on 21 February. Notwithstanding these achievements, the security situation remains precarious, and attacks on Malian defence and security forces, as well as international forces, continued unabated. In central Mali, intercommunal violence reached unprecedented levels and has been exacerbated by the presence of armed extremist groups and the proliferation of small arms and light weapons. More than 160 people of Fulani origin, mostly civilians, were killed during an attack on Ogossogou village in the Mopti region on 23 March. The border regions between Mali and Burkina Faso were the most affected by violence, with movements of presumed terrorist elements and displaced populations reported in both directions.

7. In Burkina Faso, intercommunal violence and the presence of terrorist groups, militias and criminal gangs continued to increase in the northern and north-eastern regions. On 31 December, the Burkinabe Council of Ministers declared a state of emergency for a period of six months, in 6 of 13 regions. In February, the President appointed a new cabinet and a new chief of defence staff in a bid to ramp up efforts to address the increasing security threats.

8. In the Niger, on 15 March, the Government extended a state of emergency for three months in the Diffa, Tahoua and Tillabéri Regions. During a recent joint mission by the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel and the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa to Boko Haram-affected parts of the country, interlocutors expressed concern about increased links between Boko Haram and armed groups present in the area of operations of the Joint Force. They noted that several foreign fighters of undetermined nationalities had been seen during recent operations and that the use of vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices had increased.

9. On 27 December, the Government announced that joint air and ground operations by Nigerien and French forces had killed some 15 presumed Islamist militants near the village of Tongo Tongo, on the border with Mali, approximately 175 km from Niamey. On 31 January, a Nigerien army vehicle hit an improvised explosive device on the Titahoune-Antes-Ayorou axis in Tillabéri, wounding four soldiers, two seriously. It was the first reported incident involving an improvised explosive device that targeted the forces armées nigériennes in the area.

10. In Chad, inter-ethnic violence intensified among groups involved in illegal gold mining in the north. The Government scaled up efforts to counter rebel activity in the area, closed its border with Libya on 5 March and on 25 March, and established a mixed unit in the Province of Tibesti to secure the border between Chad and Libya, fight trafficking, disarm combatants and implement security measures.

11. In Mauritania, the Government developed a more proactive military posture against jihadists, with increased restrictions on Islamic organizations. In recent weeks, the presence of armed terrorist groups has been reported in Fassalé, in the Hodh ech-Chargui Region, on the Malian border.

12. The humanitarian situation across the Sahel continued to deteriorate. As a result of the ongoing food and nutrition crisis, an estimated 274,145 children are expected to require treatment for severe acute malnutrition, an increase of more than 60 per cent compared with original estimates.

13. Nearly one third of the population of Mali lives in conflict-affected areas. The deteriorating security in-country has caused unprecedented levels of internal population movements, tripling the number of internally displaced persons, as well as causing a sharp increase in humanitarian and protection needs. By the end of 2018, 120,298 individuals were displaced, compared with 38,172 in 2017. An estimated 4.1 million people, more than half of whom were children, were in need of humanitarian assistance. Conflicts across the country led to the closure of 857 schools, 60 per cent of which were located in the Mopti region.

14. Burkina Faso is also facing an unprecedented humanitarian emergency caused by persistent insecurity in the Centre-North, East and North Regions, with 1.2 million people in critical need of assistance. In February, the number of displaced persons had reached more than 100,000. Some 120,000 children remain without access to education owing to school closures.

III. Operationalization of the Joint Force

A. Deployment update: military component

15. After the complex attack on its headquarters in Sévaré in June 2018, the Joint Force prioritized the resumption of operations. The Force Commander conducted inspections of each sector to ensure compliance with the standards set by the strategic concept of operations and to identify the needs of the various command posts. All battalions were recertified and strategies were put in place to enhance intelligence-gathering at the community level. As at 18 March, 75 per cent of troops were deployed across the three sectors.

16. The Joint Force resumed its activities in January and has carried out four operations. Operation Sanparga was conducted from 15 January to 2 February in the zone between Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger. The operation involved two companies from Burkina Faso, one from Mali and three from the Niger. From 26 January to 15 February, the Joint Force carried out Operation Taara in Sector West, in the border area between Mali and Mauritania, with the participation of one battalion from Mali and two companies from Mauritania. From 4 to 19 February, the Joint Force conducted Operation Kinassar along the northern border between the Niger and Chad, in Sector East. Two companies from Chad and the Niger participated. From 15 to 25 March, it conducted Operation Ça'igha in the Ouagadou forest, 50 km north of Diabali and 110 km south of Néma, Mauritania. An after-action review of these operations is under way. Preliminary findings indicate that the strength of Joint Force units deployed was insufficient, taking into account the uneven and densely forested,

mountainous or arid terrain. Information-sharing and coordination between the Joint Force and the States members of G-5 Sahel remain challenging.

17. The Joint Force also increased its civil-military cooperation activities. They included the distribution of food items, school kits and medicines, and free medical consultations in the villages of Tarsa and Nouran in Mali, in Meddala and Terbekou in Mauritania, in Taguey in the Niger and in Markoy and Intangom in Burkina Faso.

18. On 1 March, Malian armed forces operating under the Joint Force command and returning from Boulikessi hit an improvised explosive device on the eastern road between Dioungani and Koro. Nine soldiers were killed and one was injured.

19. Following the decision of the chiefs of defence staff on 25 October to relocate the Joint Force's headquarters to Bamako, the Joint Force leadership and Malian authorities signed an agreement, providing the Joint Force with temporary headquarters at the Mess des officiers in Badalabougou, Bamako. Renovation work began in mid-March. The European Union agreed to fund construction works and carry them out through its contractor, Expertise France.

20. The Joint Force continues to face important training, capability and equipment shortfalls. The lack of individual protection equipment, armoured vehicles and transport capabilities, as well as non-existent logistical supply chains to transport fuel and rations from MINUSMA bases to the Joint Force command posts, combined with the threat of improvised explosive devices, constitute major challenges. The construction and fortification of the Joint Force's operating bases also remain critical needs. In a letter to my Special Representative in Mali dated 18 March, the Joint Force Commander requested the assistance of MINUSMA with the construction of two camps for the Malian battalions deployed to Tessit and Boulikessi, in the Mopti region. MINUSMA will update its existing horizontal construction plans on the basis of United Nations standards and re-evaluate the cost.

21. The Joint Force, the European Union and MINUSMA continued to conduct fortnightly tripartite meetings in Bamako to discuss technical aspects relating to the operationalization of the Joint Force and support provided by the European Union and the United Nations. In January, the Joint Force, the European Union, MINUSMA, Operation Barkhane and Malian armed forces created the Coordinating Body for Mali, which is convened on a monthly basis and serves as a framework to enhance information-sharing and coordination among the various military and security forces present in Mali.

22. A clarification and further development of the Joint Force's strategic concept of operations remain pending. Several aspects pertaining to phase 1, such as the right to hot pursuit, in particular in cases in which armed forces might be operating under both national and Joint Force command in the same area, still need to be clarified. The desired end-state of the Joint Force also still needs to be defined, as the strategic concept of operations does not provide details of what the implementation of phase 2 would resemble.

B. Deployment update: police and civilian component

23. The G-5 Sahel countries took steps to put in place specialized investigations units within national jurisdictions in charge of cases of terrorism and transnational organized crime as part of the police component. In Mali, a special investigations brigade is in the process of establishing antennas close to Central and West Sectors of the Joint Force. In Mauritania, 20 police officers from specialized services were designated to constitute the Mauritanian investigations unit in Sector West. In the Niger, the national counter-terrorism service opened a branch and deployed 9 out of

30 law enforcement officers in Bankilaré, in the western part of the country, to serve as the investigations unit in Central Sector. It intends to open another branch in Madama for Sector East.

24. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) continued to support the permanent secretariat of G-5 Sahel in the establishment of the police component and provided advice to ensure the efficient judicialization of Joint Force military operations.

C. Implementation of the human rights and international humanitarian law compliance framework

25. With regard to the human rights and international humanitarian law compliance framework, the Joint Force has made advances in defining the rules of engagement, a code of conduct and guidelines on how to engage and communicate with the civilian population. On 4 March, the Joint Force Commander signed a new standard operating procedure on capture, retention, transfer and liberation. The procedure applies to all individuals arrested and detained by the Joint Force, specifies the treatment of women, girls and boys and was developed with the technical support of the United Nations. Initial awareness-raising of the procedure was conducted on 15 March at the Joint Force's Sector Centre headquarters in Niamey at the onset of a new cross-border operation.

26. OHCHR and other technical partners continued to provide support for the operationalization of the human rights and international humanitarian law compliance framework for the Joint Force. My Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights, Andrew Gilmour, conducted a visit to Mauritania, Senegal, Burkina Faso, the Niger and Belgium, from 13 to 23 January, to advocate continued support for the operationalization of the framework. The United Nations Children's Fund, MINUSMA and the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict provided technical assistance to mainstream child protection issues into all aspects of the strategic concept of operations and the inclusion of child protection concerns among the priorities of the human rights and international humanitarian law compliance framework. A total of 24 participants from the Joint Force and army commands of G-5 Sahel countries jointly attended a specialized course on international humanitarian law and international human rights law, with representatives of OHCHR, which was given in Sanremo, Italy, from 3 to 14 December. Through the workshop, existing collaboration and working relationships were further strengthened. Additional workshops to operationalize the compliance framework and finalize the Joint Force's status-of-forces agreement were held in Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger. During the period under review, officers with provost duties were deployed to the Joint Force's battalions in Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali and Mauritania in support of the most recent G-5 military operations.

27. Criminal investigations into the killing of 12 civilians on 19 May 2018 by Malian armed forces elements operating under G-5 Sahel command in Boulikessi, in the Mopti region, have yet to be concluded. A number of hearings of individuals alleged to have been involved in the incident have been conducted.

28. On 16 March, in Nbeiket el Ahouach, Mauritania, near the border with Mali, one civilian was killed by a member of the Mauritanian contingent of the Joint Force in the vicinity of its base. Mauritanian authorities have opened an investigation into the matter.

D. Permanent secretariat of the Group of Five for the Sahel and trust fund

29. States members of G-5 Sahel, as well as the Permanent Secretary of the Group of Five, continued their efforts to restructure the secretariat and to strengthen partnerships, including by conducting an organizational audit to determine new staffing positions on the basis of workload demands. As an interim measure, the permanent secretariat received staffing support from the European Union as well as several United Nations entities, including OHCHR, UNODC, the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations, the World Food Programme, the United Nations Development Programme and MINUSMA. Chad deployed a military officer to the Security and Defence Bureau of the permanent secretariat. Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger have nominated finance, audit and procurement experts, to be deployed in the coming months.

30. Little progress has been made in the establishment of a support group for the Joint Force, at the technical and political levels, to serve as a platform to exchange views on the operationalization of the Joint Force and coordination with national, regional and international partners, and as envisaged in Security Council resolution [2391 \(2017\)](#).

31. Further efforts have been made in operationalizing the G-5 Sahel trust fund. Its main oversight mechanism to approve funding requests, the support committee, is now operational. It comprises 10 representatives of countries that are members of G-5 Sahel and is headed by a coordinator appointed by the presidency. The Oversight Committee, which will include donors and other stakeholders, is in the process of being established. In February, 7.82 billion CFA francs, or \$13.4 million, were deposited into the trust fund, through contributions from Rwanda (\$500,000), the West African Economic and Monetary Union 500 million CFA francs, or approximately \$867,000), the Economic Community of West African States (\$1 million) and the United Arab Emirates (\$10 million).

IV. International support for the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel

A. Multilateral support

32. Some €430 million have been pledged to date in support of the Joint Force, of which the European Union has disbursed €61 million in direct support to the Force, including €56 million to its implementing partner Expertise France, and €5 million to MINUSMA. Pledges in the amount of €84 million received from donors since the high-level donors' conference in Brussels in February 2018 have been earmarked, and out of that sum, €17.2 million were fully disbursed for procuring equipment and enhancing infrastructure. In February 2019, the G-5 Sahel Defence and Security Committee endorsed the recommendations of the workshop on the police component held in April 2018 in the Niger, which render the European Union coordination hub responsible for collecting and harmonizing pledges in support of the operationalization of the police component.

33. The Group of Five has devised its own resource mobilization strategy to generate funds for the G-5 Sahel trust fund. Representatives of Mauritania and Chad travelled to the Middle East, representatives of the Niger and Burkina Faso went to India and China and representatives of Mali, together with the Permanent Secretary of the Group of Five, travelled to Europe.

B. Support from the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali

34. From March 2018 to February 2019, MINUSMA received 25 requests for support from the Joint Force, in the amount of approximately \$2.3 million, including support for transportation, engineering advisory services, information technology equipment, combat rations, fuel, oil and lubricants. MINUSMA responded favourably to all the requests. In March, the Mission received four additional requests, three for life-support consumables and one for training in casualty evacuation. Owing to a number of significant constraints, including the absence of transport and logistics capabilities, most of the life-support consumables that had been requested since June 2018 could not be collected, and the requests were subsequently cancelled by the Joint Force leadership on 10 January. Ultimately, of the first \$6.2 million tranche of \$12 million provided by the European Union for MINUSMA support to the Joint Force for the implementation of the technical agreement, only \$472,228, or less than 8 per cent, was used.

35. The transport and storage of life-support consumables supplied by MINUSMA remain a major challenge for the Joint Force and have constituted the single largest obstacle to making full use of the support provided by the Mission. In addition, the geographical restrictions imposed through resolution 2391 (2017), and the consequent technical agreement, limit MINUSMA support to Malian territory and therefore to only two of seven battalions deployed to the Joint Force, or fewer than 29 per cent of its troops.

36. MINUSMA contracted with a civilian engineer in May 2018 for the preparation of the engineering and technical generic design and scope of work for the construction and fortification of five camps for the Malian battalions of the Joint Force in Tessit, Boulikessi, Nampala, Goma Coura and Guiré. However, the Joint Force consequently informed the Mission that it no longer required assistance for the fortification of the Guiré camp, and therefore sought engineering support for the horizontal construction of two 4-hectare camps and two 10-hectare camps, at a total estimated cost of \$12.8 million. In September, following consultations with the Joint Force, the Mission completed the scope of work of the Tessit and Boulikessi camps, which were approved by the Joint Force leadership. Reconnaissance visits to the other sites have yet to be conducted. In two letters, dated 1 November and 9 December, the Joint Force leadership informed the Mission that it intended to prioritize the funds allocated by the European Union for MINUSMA support and use them for rations, fuel and casualty evacuation only, while seeking support from other partners for its constructions needs. It reversed its decision when it requested support for the fortification of the Tessit and Boulikessi camps (see para. 20 above).

V. Complementarity with other non-security initiatives

37. The Joint Force is part of a broader strategy to address underdevelopment, insecurity and instability in the Sahel region. In the Joint Force's strategic concept of operations, it is stated that its operations are also intended to facilitate the work of humanitarian and development actors. Furthermore, the operationalization of the Joint Force falls under the security pillar of G-5 Sahel regional strategy and Priority Investment Programme. It must be considered as part of a multitude of efforts to strengthen security sector reform, access to justice and criminal justice reform, to strengthen capacities for countering terrorism and transnational crime and preventing radicalization and to promote capacities for fostering development and countering the effects of climate change in the region, in line with the United Nations integrated

strategy for the Sahel and the United Nations Support Plan for the Sahel, to advance its implementation.

A. Efforts under the Priority Investment Programme of the Group of Five for the Sahel

38. On 6 December, the African Union and G-5 Sahel co-hosted a donor conference in support of the G-5 Sahel Priority Investment Programme in Nouakchott. Donors pledged more than \$2.3 billion, exceeding the initially projected financial needs. The conference was attended by all five Heads of State of the G-5 Sahel countries, in addition to the President of France, Emmanuel Macron, and the Chairperson of the African Union Commission. In their final recommendations, attendees urged the Security Council to approve a Chapter VII mandate for the Joint Force and to accelerate the establishment of the Joint Force trust fund. They also called for harmonization between the G-5 Sahel Priority Investment Programme and the United Nations Support Plan for the Sahel and alignment between the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel and the African Union strategy for the Sahel.

39. As part of its stated objective to complement military interventions with development initiatives, G-5 Sahel enhanced its partnerships to accelerate the implementation of its Priority Investment Programme and to focus development interventions on areas where the most vulnerable communities live. On 30 October, the G-5 Sahel Council of Ministers and the Alliance for the Sahel signed a letter of cooperation to implement an emergency programme for the rehabilitation of local infrastructure in border areas. The programme consists of rural water projects for communities and cattle herders, and initiatives to promote social cohesion, access to justice and improved community safety in vulnerable border locations.

B. Alliance for the Sahel

40. By the end of 2018, €1 billion for projects implemented under the umbrella of the Alliance for the Sahel had been disbursed, out of a total of €4 billion earmarked for such projects. The Alliance further strengthened its working relationship with the permanent secretariat of G-5 Sahel and established mechanisms to respond to urgent needs, including an emergency programme for the rehabilitation of local infrastructure in border areas with highly vulnerable populations.

C. Other regional and subregional initiatives

41. States members of G-5 Sahel increased their regional cooperation with neighbouring states. On 22 February, the President of Ghana, Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo, hosted a regional summit in Accra on insecurity and efforts to combat terrorism. The summit was attended by the President of Benin, Patrice Athanase Guillaume Talon; the President of Togo, Faure Essozimna Gnassingbé; and the President of Burkina Faso, Mr. Kaboré, as well as the Vice-President of Côte d'Ivoire, Daniel Kablan Duncan. Discussions were focused on practical steps to increase military cooperation and information-sharing.

42. The Counter-Terrorism Executive Directorate and UNODC, together with the African Union and United Nations partners, including the International Organization for Migration and the United Nations Development Programme, supported the Lake Chad Basin Commission and its member States in designing strategies to screen, prosecute, rehabilitate and reintegrate individuals associated with Boko Haram, as requested in Security Council resolutions [2178 \(2014\)](#), [2349 \(2017\)](#) and [2396 \(2017\)](#)

and in the framework of the Regional Stabilization, Recovery and Resilience Strategy for Areas Affected by Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Basin Region. This included a visit to Chad in March conducted by the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa, the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel, the Directorate and the European Union in order to support Chad, the Lake Chad Basin Commission and the Multinational Joint Task Force in their efforts to address the effects of violence perpetrated by Boko Haram and “Islamic State in Greater Sahara” on peace and stability. Participants discussed the possibility of enhancing coordination and information-sharing, including of best practices and lessons learned, between the Multinational Joint Task Force and the Joint Force.

43. On 27 November, countries from the Sahelo-Saharan region convened the fifth ministerial meeting of the Nouakchott Process in Ouagadougou. The meeting was preceded on 26 November by the ninth meeting of the heads of intelligence and security services, also held in Ouagadougou.

VI. Support options going forward

44. In my three previous reports on the Joint Force ([S/2017/869](#), [S/2018/432](#) and [S/2018/1006](#)), I presented four options for United Nations support to the Joint Force, ranging from the establishment of a dedicated United Nations office funded through assessed contributions to a more limited provision of assistance through MINUSMA. In adopting resolution [2391 \(2017\)](#), the Security Council opted for the latter, namely, the provision of support through MINUSMA, limited to the territory of Mali and relying on the Mission’s existing logistics and supply chains.

45. In the present report, I urge once again that a more extensive and comprehensive support package to the Joint Force be established, through the United Nations or other mechanisms. Difficulties in generating sustainable and predictable financing, as well as limitations imposed on MINUSMA support to the Joint Force, as outlined above, constitute a major obstacle to the full operationalization of the Joint Force.

VII. Observations

46. I am deeply concerned about the deterioration of the security situation in Mali and the Sahel region. The Sahel faces severe transnational challenges, including: climate change and drought; population growth and worsening youth unemployment; the smuggling of people; irregular migration; trafficking in weapons and drugs; and violent extremism and terrorism. Violence in the Sahel long seemed to have spared Burkina Faso, but that is no longer the case, and there are also spillover effects on Benin, Côte d’Ivoire, Ghana and Togo. The Joint Force remains a critical part of a series of regional and international security responses to address extremist armed groups in the Sahel, along with other cross-border challenges, including trafficking in persons, illicit goods, weapons and drugs; migration; and displacement. The Joint Force alone cannot secure the Sahel. More needs to be done to prevent further deterioration of the situation in the Sahel region. Greater regional cooperation and efforts to combat the terrorist and trafficking threats are needed from all of us in order to do so.

47. I am encouraged by the resumption of the operations of the Joint Force in January 2019 and the continued commitment of G-5 Sahel to the establishment of a human rights and international humanitarian law compliance framework. The resumption of the operations was a much-anticipated and welcome development. I pay tribute to the determination and commitment of G-5 Sahel countries to standing together and making their vision succeed. I commend the efforts by the Joint Force

leadership to build a more cohesive force and overcome obstacles after the lethal attack on the Force headquarters in Sévaré in 2018. I welcome the progress registered towards establishing the police component and putting in place a human rights and international humanitarian law compliance framework. To be effective, the Joint Force will need the trust and support of local populations, whose rights must be respected. Mistakes and abuses risk driving people in the region towards giving their allegiance to extremist groups, which are skilled at offering protection and promises of revenge.

48. With a majority of troops deployed, it is now critical to ensure that the Joint Force scales up its current level of operations and produces tangible results to demonstrate its added value and effectiveness. At the same time, this leaves little room to focus on comprehensive security sector reform, which should underpin all efforts to operationalize the Joint Force. In Mali in particular, the scope, scale and configuration of the reconstituted armed forces have yet to be addressed, making a systematic and strategic fight against terrorism challenging. I urge the States members of G-5 Sahel to accelerate and intensify their efforts in this regard. This will require sustained and effective international support. Persistent challenges will need to be addressed, including training and capability shortfalls and the absence of fortified and secure operational bases.

49. The full operationalization of the Joint Force will only be possible if it receives consistent and predictable support. In my previous reports, I presented options for United Nations support for the Joint Force. I remain convinced that only a United Nations support office, funded through assessed contributions and independent of MINUSMA, will allow for predictable and sustainable financing of support for the Joint Force, longer-term planning and the consolidation of this important initiative, as stated in my previous reports. I once again call upon the members of the Security Council to be more ambitious in the mandate that they bestow upon the Joint Force, and I echo the calls by leaders from the region to place the Joint Force under a Chapter VII mandate. While I recall that such a mandate does not guarantee automatic funding through assessed contributions, it would provide the Joint Force with the additional political legitimacy that this important initiative deserves.

50. In its resolution [2391 \(2017\)](#), the Security Council authorized the provision of support through MINUSMA to the defence and security forces of G-5 Sahel States when operating in Malian territory in the framework of the Joint Force and relying on the Mission's existing logistics and supply chains. The provision of life-support consumables procured by MINUSMA has the potential to allow all battalions operating under Joint Force command, not only those operating in Mali, to enhance their ability to deliver on their mandate, given the current level of capacities of the Joint Force. I therefore recommend that the Council consider authorizing MINUSMA to provide such support to battalions operating in the framework of the Joint Force, on the condition that the Joint Force or other partners take responsibility for ensuring the delivery of the support to their respective areas of operations in strict compliance with the human rights due diligence policy on United Nations support to non-United Nations security forces.

51. I welcome the resumption of the Nouakchott Process, which could serve as a forum to better integrate security initiatives in the region, including enhanced information-sharing between the Multinational Joint Task Force and the Joint Force. The African Union has an important leadership role to play in this regard, and I welcome its engagement. More generally, and in line with my Action for Peacekeeping initiative, I reiterate my encouragement to the members of the Security Council to consider further opportunities to reinforce partnerships and strengthen the role of the African Union in discussions of African-led peace operations.

52. Security initiatives in the Sahel will only have a lasting effect if underdevelopment, poverty, governance, the lack of access to basic services and economic opportunities, systematic exclusion and the effects of climate change are addressed simultaneously. Security operations and development programmes must be planned and programmed through a more integrated approach in order to enable synergies and quick results. The G-5 Sahel Priority Investment Programme and the United Nations Support Plan for the Sahel provide the appropriate framework and toolbox in this regard. I express my deep gratitude for donors' generous contributions to the Priority Investment Programme. It is important that these pledges be followed by timely disbursements.

53. Lastly, I reiterate that it remains our shared responsibility to support the States members of G-5 Sahel in their efforts to stabilize the region. I express my deep gratitude to the European Union for its steadfast and effective support and to other donors for their generous contributions. I call upon donors who have not disbursed their pledges to the African Peace Facility to do so without further delay. I also express my gratitude to my Special Representative for Mali, Mahamat Saleh Annadif, and to all MINUSMA colleagues, who have spared no effort to ensure that the Mission stands ready to provide support to the Joint Force, whenever it is requested, within the confines of resolution [2391 \(2017\)](#) and the technical agreement.
