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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 \(2017\)](#), in which the Council requested me, in close coordination with the members of the Group of Five for the Sahel (G5 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 and the support provided by the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) in this regard. Following a thorough review of the support model conducted in April 2020, the Security Council adopted resolution [2531 \(2020\)](#), renewing the mandate of MINUSMA and recommending enhanced support of the Mission to the Joint Force.

2. The report provides an update on progress made in the operationalization of the Joint Force since my report of 8 May 2020 ([S/2020/373](#)), including international support for the Force and implementation of the technical agreement signed between the United Nations, the European Union and G5 Sahel States in February 2018. The report also highlights the challenges encountered by the Force and the implementation by the G5 Sahel States of a human rights and international humanitarian law compliance framework.

3. The reporting period was marked by repeated complex terrorist attacks on positions of the defence and security forces in the region, suggesting well-coordinated operational and logistical connections between terrorist groups operating broadly in the Sahel, from Mauritania to the Lake Chad basin. The Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin, affiliated with Al-Qaida, reclaimed territory from Islamic State in the Greater Sahara, expanding its influence from central Mali to eastern Burkina Faso and along the Mali-Niger border, while many parts of the Niger continue to be a focus in the regional power struggle among different groups.

4. The intensification of intercommunal conflicts, often instrumentalized by local armed groups and terrorist groups, further complicated the security situation in the areas of operation of the Joint Force. Civilian populations are often caught between armed groups, intercommunal violence and military operations, causing displacements and restrictions of movement, all severely affecting access to services, livelihoods and assistance. The humanitarian situation in the Sahel is rapidly and significantly deteriorating. In 2020, a new record high of 31.4 million Sahelians required assistance and protection. More people than ever before have had to flee



their homes. Across the region, 5 million people were uprooted, 2 million people more than in 2018 and five times more than in 2012. The Sahel faces unprecedented levels of food insecurity. More than 14 million people are struggling with crisis or emergency levels of food insecurity during the lean season, the highest level since the beginning of the Sahel crisis in 2011. Conflict is severely affecting livelihoods, markets and access to food.

II. Operationalization of the Joint Force

5. According to the Joint Force, at present the security situation remains relatively calm in the northern part of Sector West, along Mali's border with Mauritania. The situation, however, remains volatile in the southern part of the Sector. Complex attacks against the Joint Force in that area, particularly in Bouka Were on 14 June, point to increased terrorist operations. There is concern regarding the regrouping of terrorist elements along the border in Ouagadougou forest.

6. Attacks continued in the Lake Chad area, where a Boko Haram faction, Islamic State West Africa Province, remains a threat to north-east Nigeria and neighbouring countries, including Chad and the Niger. In the northern part of Sector East, the two battalions of the Joint Force located in Madama and Wour to protect the Libyan border area, regularly confronted traffickers of weapons, drugs, gold and irregular migrants.

7. In Sector Centre, particularly in the Liptako-Gourma area, where the borders of Burkina Faso, Mali, and the Niger converge, the Joint Force reported decreased terrorist activities following several operations. Terrorists appear to have focused their actions further west, towards Côte D'Ivoire and areas of the border between Burkina Faso and the Niger. The continued competition between Islamic State in the Greater Sahara and the Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin over illicit trafficking routes in central Mali continued to negatively affect the security of civilians in the Liptako-Gourma area, including attacks on high-value targets including humanitarian workers and notabilities. Also, extortions, robberies, cattle rustling and looting did not decrease.

A. Military component

8. During the previous and current reporting periods, two operations were conducted in Sector Centre, in coordination with Operation Barkhane led by France, aimed at improving the security situation, namely Operation Sama 1 and Operation Sama 2, launched on 3 March and 1 August 2020, respectively. Operation Sama 1 ended on 31 July and was positively assessed by the Joint Force leadership, having resulted in significant losses registered by terrorist armed groups, including the abandonment of equipment such as motorbikes, fuel, weapons and radios. Following the 18 August 2020 military coup in Mali, the decision of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) not to impose embargo measures on military operations in the context of sanctions, allowed for continuity of Joint Force operations. Operation Sama 2 is expected to last six months, until the end of January 2021. During the eighth ordinary session of the G5 Sahel Council of Ministers, held on 5 October in Nouakchott, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Chad announced the deployment of a Chadian battalion to participate in Operation Sama 2.

9. According to the Joint Force command, the operations that have been undertaken to date, have helped to create the conditions that would allow for the progressive return of national armed forces and local authorities. The pressure placed on terrorist groups has led to a decrease in their stranglehold on vulnerable populations and contributed to the stabilization of the security situation in areas of

Joint Force operations. So far, the joint operations have resulted in the neutralization or arrest of terrorists and traffickers, the seizure or destruction of assets (including vehicles, weapons and ammunition), as well as the destruction of logistical depots and facilities used to produce improvised explosive devices.

10. Joint Force units have acquired additional practical experience and efficiency in their operations, in particular in coordination and responsiveness. The completion and handover, on 3 June, by MINUSMA to the Joint Force of the facilities for the Joint Force temporary command post in Senou, in the outskirts of Bamako, greatly enhanced the ability of the Joint Force to operate more efficiently, notably ensuring an improvement in its planning and operational tasks.

11. The Joint Force and partners, such as Operation Barkhane, the Malian Defence and Security Forces and MINUSMA, enhanced their coordination through joint meetings and bilateral exchanges. On 27 July, the Instance de coordination militaire au Mali held a meeting between the commanders of the main security forces operating in Mali. Furthermore, operational coordination meetings have been organized on a monthly basis to share assessments between all partner forces. The last such meeting was organized by the European Union Training Mission in Mali on 1 October. The coordination of efforts allowed for a more visible presence of defence and security forces on the ground, as well as increased pressure on terrorist groups.

12. On 29 September, the G5 Sahel, the European Union and MINUSMA held a tripartite coordination meeting to discuss, among other issues, the implementation of the provisions in Security Council resolution [2531 \(2020\)](#) concerning support for the Joint Force, particularly its new aspects, inter alia, allowing for the delivery of life support consumables through the United Nations procurement process, in consultation with the G5 Sahel executive secretariat, at locations agreed upon by the Joint Force and MINUSMA. The tripartite meeting offered an opportunity to discuss ongoing assistance and stressed the need for additional funding to operationalize the delivery of support to the Joint Force through the United Nations procurement process. There was an agreement on the importance of enhanced cooperation and information exchange to allow a full application of the human rights due diligence policy.

B. Police component

13. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) continued to support the G5 Sahel Security Cooperation Platform, through a series of online weekly meetings, with the aim of strengthening and streamlining intelligence-sharing with the police component.

14. In close coordination with UNODC and the European Union capacity-building mission in Mali, EUCAP Sahel Mali, MINUSMA police continued to provide training and technical operational support to further strengthen the Specialized Investigation Brigade on Terrorism and Transnational Organized Crime. In order to strengthen accountability of the Joint Force, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) supported the elaboration of two instructions on internal investigations and commenced the planning and development of a human rights training plan and modules for the Joint Force police component in coordination with all technical partners. Joint field visits by OHCHR, Joint Force headquarters and magistrates of the five judicial authorities, were undertaken to Burkina Faso, the Niger and Mauritania (from 28 September–2 October, 5–12 October and 12–16 October, respectively), in order to sensitize provost corps and military officers on human rights violations and the conduct of internal investigations. Similar

visits planned to Mali and Chad in October 2020, have been rescheduled for early 2021, owing to troop rotations.

15. Through its Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace, the European Union contributes 18 million euros to the operationalization of the police component of the Joint Force. This contribution is aimed at supporting Specialized Investigative Units in the five countries, by offering training and equipment, and supports coordination at regional level through the G5 Sahel executive secretariat.

16. In addition to the life support consumables provided by MINUSMA, during the month of April, at the request of the Joint Force, UNODC procured personal protective equipment (PPE) for the Joint Force to use in order to ensure continuity of operations in the context of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) prevention throughout the reporting period.

C. G5 Sahel executive secretariat

17. Following the 18 August coup in Mali, the G5 Sahel Executive Secretary, on behalf of the President of Mauritania and current Chair of the G5 Sahel, Mohamed Ould Cheikh Ghazouani, led a delegation to Bamako on 22 August to engage with the Joint Force Command Headquarters, ECOWAS and the leaders of the Comité national pour le salut du peuple, to call for continuity of Joint Force operations. Subsequently, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Mauritania, Ishmael Cheikh, conducted a follow-up mission to Bamako to further stress the need to prevent a spillover of violence across the Malian border with Mauritania, while highlighting the need for the Joint Force to abide by human rights principles in the conduct of counter-terrorism operations.

18. During the reporting period, the executive secretariat of the G5 Sahel continued to support the operationalization of the Joint Force through the Comité de soutien de la Force Conjointe du G5 Sahel. The executive secretariat supervised the acquisition of logistics for the Force, in particular transport assets, by liaising with Member States to ensure conformity with national procurement rules. The Executive Secretariat also continued to lead advocacy for contributions towards the G5 Sahel Joint Force trust fund.

19. On 27 July, the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of France and the G5 Sahel held a meeting to discuss further steps in the operationalization of the international coalition for the Sahel, notably the establishment of its secretariat and that of the office of a High Representative, in close collaboration with the G5 Sahel executive secretariat.

D. Issues and challenges

20. The onset of the rainy season (June-September) contributed to a temporary pause in the process of renewing Joint Force battalions with fresh troops, which hampered military activities by limiting the mobility of troops and constraining logistical capacities. Many areas of operation became almost inaccessible by road during the rainy season. During this period, the Joint Force faced challenges in providing supplies to its troops, a problem worsened by a lack of suitable means of transport. Nonetheless, according to Joint Force leadership, as the rainy season neared its end there were signs of high morale among troops and the Joint Force command, as they focused on plans to relaunch their operations.

21. More generally, equipment shortfalls remained a daily preoccupation that constrained the efficiency and operations of troops deployed in garrisons, as well as

affecting morale. The resulting limitation of mobility slowed or delayed operations on the ground and made coordination between security partners more complex.

22. As a consequence, terrorist activities decreased in the Mali-Niger-Burkina Faso borders, in addition to a decrease in the presence of transnational organized criminal elements in the Niger-Libya-Chad borders. There was, however, a resurgence of armed groups in Sector West and continued attacks in central Mali, coupled with the persistence of intracommunity violence, undermined the gains achieved during the first half of 2020.

23. Cooperation among security partners was pursued and strengthened. MINUSMA's uninterrupted and responsive operational and logistic support to the Joint Force, including during the rainy season, remained essential to the Force's operations, especially in Sector Centre.

III. Implementation of the human rights and international humanitarian law compliance framework of the Joint Force and the human rights due diligence policy

24. The human rights due diligence policy sets forth and enforces the conditions for the delivery of support to non-United Nations security forces, while the human rights and humanitarian law compliance framework establishes a technical cooperation framework allowing OHCHR and other partners to help the Joint Force to integrate human rights and international humanitarian laws norms and principles into the planning and conduct of military operations. Both are thus complementary, and during the reporting period the Joint Force has made significant strides in the implementation of the compliance framework, despite restrictions related to COVID-19 prevention measures.

25. Within the framework of the human rights due diligence policy, MINUSMA and OHCHR continued to monitor the human rights situation in relation to counter-terrorism operations conducted by the Joint Force in the five countries. On 15 June, MINUSMA shared with the Joint Force a list of five possible cases of serious human rights violations allegedly committed by the battalion operating in Boulikessi, Mali. The incidents occurred in the localities of Kobou (30 km west of Boulikessi) on 13 March, Pogol-N'daki (7 km north of Boulikessi) on 14 March and 21 March, Tchiofol Boulmoutaka (7 km west of Boulikessi) on 19 March and Toussougou (8 km south of Boulikessi) on 24 March and involved the alleged killing, in some cases the possible extrajudicial executions, of 47 civilians, including 3 women. In its response to MINUSMA, dated 2 July, the Commander of the Joint Force took note of the list of cases and promised prompt internal investigations in conformity with the Joint Force standard operating procedures on internal investigations.

26. Findings by MINUSMA also document 50 alleged arbitrary executions by Burkina Faso forces between 26 and 28 May, including one woman in Malian territory, in the context of counter-terrorism operations conducted jointly with Malian armed forces. These incidents occurred in the localities of Peoukouye (3 km north of Boulikessi), Kouroudoli (10 km east of Boulikessi), Kouna (7 km south-east of Boulikessi) and in Hanfasou (Gossi cercle, Timbuktu region). It remains unclear whether the Malian and Burkina Faso armed forces acted under the command and control of the Joint Force or under their respective national military commands. This is owing to, among other reasons, the lack of distinctive insignia for elements who were serving under the Joint Force at that time, as well as the absence of a fully operational civilian casualty tracking system and clearly communicated command responsibilities for alleged human rights violations during operations.

27. On 27 June 2020, the Joint Force established an internal mechanism, the Civilian Casualty and Incident Tracking and Analysis Cell. MINUSMA and OHCHR along with other partners plan to carry out a series of trainings and workshops to operationalize the mechanism and to facilitate the future organization of regular deconfliction exercises between Joint Force operations and those conducted under national command of each country of the G5 Sahel.

28. On 4 August, MINUSMA and OHCHR procured 9,500 military badges for the Joint Force, critical to facilitating the identification of all Joint Force personnel in line with international standards, thus remedying the lack of distinctive insignia which made distinguishing Joint Force and national army personnel a challenge.

29. MINUSMA and OHCHR continued to follow-up on the case of Joint Force members accused of killing a civilian on 13 March 2019 during a Joint Force operation in Nbeiket el Ahouach (Mauritania). The trial is pending.

30. Although several capacity-building activities were curtailed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, OHCHR organized a remote online training on human rights and international humanitarian law from 29 June to 3 July for 26 military personnel through the Sahel Defence College in Mauritania. OHCHR also continued providing technical advice supporting the revision of key elements in the Joint Force doctrine.

31. Significant progress has been made by the Joint Force in terms of mitigation measures, primarily as a result of the ongoing establishment of the compliance framework by the Force, supported by OHCHR. This has included the finalization of standard operating procedures for internal investigations and the establishment of a mechanism for identifying, monitoring and analysing harm to civilians.

32. On 17 September, MINUSMA in coordination with EUCAP Sahel Mali delivered a sensitization session on international human rights law and international humanitarian law, as well as on conflict-related sexual violence, to 10 gendarmes from the provost deployed to the Boulikessi battalion. The training took place in Mopti and focused on the human rights standards applicable in the conduct of counter-terrorism operations, including procedures on capture, detention and transfer of detainees.

33. In addition to its presence in Mali and Mauritania, and in the context of a relaxation of COVID-19 prevention measures that led to the gradual opening of the borders across the region, OHCHR has also deployed staff to Chad and the Niger. This deployment aims at supporting the implementation of the compliance framework at field level with national actors and the respective Joint Force operational and tactical commands.

Human rights due diligence policy

34. MINUSMA continued to implement the human rights due diligence policy in its support to the Joint Force, but challenges remain, including limited progress made by the Joint Force in implementing key risk-mitigating measures. While there has been progress since the adoption of the standard operating procedures on internal investigations on 26 June, and since the setting-up of a mechanism for identifying, monitoring and analysing harm to civilians, on 27 June, other mitigation measures have yet to be implemented by the Joint Force.

35. These include the finalization of internal guidelines for the use of provosts during Joint Force operations, and the preparation of standard operating procedures on collateral damage. In addition, the Joint Force committed to transmit to MINUSMA the list of battalion commanders for the three sectors, and followed up on pending internal investigations in collaboration with national authorities for judicial cases involving members of the Joint Force. Additionally, the Joint Force was

requested to keep MINUSMA informed of any incident occurring in the course of operations with an impact on civilians, as well as all measures taken pursuant to the standard operating procedures on capture, detention and transfer of suspects, adopted by the Joint Force command on 4 March 2019.

36. On 8 September, the Human Rights and Protection Division of MINUSMA chaired the first legal advisors meeting of the Instance de coordination au Mali, comprising personnel from MINUSMA, the Joint Force, the European Union Training Mission in Mali, and the French forces from Operation Barkhane. The objectives of the forum included, inter alia, establishing modalities of cooperation between the international forces operating in Mali and the Human Rights and Protection Division, exchanging information on incidents affecting the civilian population during military and counter-terrorism operations, as well as on any corrective measures implemented.

IV. International support for the Joint Force

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

37. MINUSMA continued to provide logistical support to the seven battalions operating under the command of the Joint Force. Between 8 May and 30 September, the Mission received six requests related to rations and petrol, oil and lubricants. All requests received during the reporting period were approved and fulfilled, including within the 14-day response time stipulated by the technical arrangement between the G5 Sahel, the United Nations and the European Commission, except for two which required a more extensive human rights due diligence policy assessment.

38. Further to Security Council resolution [2531 \(2020\)](#) that authorizes MINUSMA to engage private contractors to deliver life support consumables to Joint Force contingents operating outside of Malian territory, the Mission began making appropriate arrangements to implement such support. The Mission held a series of consultations with the Joint Force leadership and the G5 Sahel executive secretariat to determine needs, desired quantities and suitable drop-off locations in order to help identify contractors capable of delivering life support consumables closer to the area of operations of the Joint Force's contingents in all three sectors, managing associated security risks. The coup d'état on 18 August in Mali somewhat delayed this process. On 29 September, the G5 Sahel, the European Union and the United Nations held a tripartite meeting in Nouakchott during which discussions were finalized on the type of desired rations, locations for delivery, the methodology of the United Nations procurement process and, most importantly, funding and contractual matters.

Update on requests for life support consumables received by contingents

39. On 31 March 2020, MINUSMA received the Joint Force's quarterly support plan for the period from April to June 2020, which included 43,000 combat ration packs and 644,100 litres of fuel and lubricants, amounting to \$1.7 million. The Mission responded positively to the plan and specific requests, which are subject to human rights risk assessment and due diligence. So far, MINUSMA has provided 30,500 ration packs and 443,700 litres of fuel and lubricants, valued at \$1.2 million, which represents a collection and consumption rate of 69 per cent of the quarterly support plan.

40. On 22 June 2020, the Joint Force submitted its quarterly support plan for the period from July to September 2020. The pick-up locations for the items contained in the plan and quantities per item are summarized in Table 1 below.

Table 1
Pick-up locations and items requested in the quarterly support plan (Jul–Sep)

<i>Location</i>	<i>Combat ration packs (packs)</i>	<i>Fuel (l)</i>	<i>Water (l)</i>	<i>Oil 50 (l)</i>	<i>Grease (kg)</i>	<i>Coolant (l)</i>
Bamako	19 000	594 300	–	6 600	780	840
Gao	2 000	30 000	–	1 000	120	120
Sévaré	3 000	–	–	1 000	120	120
Total	24 000	624 300	–	8 600	1 020	1 080

41. The Joint Force also submitted its quarterly support plan to cover the period from October to December 2020, thus more petroleum, oil and lubricants were added as detailed in Table 2.

Table 2
Pick-up locations and items requested in the quarterly support plan extension (Oct–Dec)

<i>Location</i>	<i>Combat ration packs (packs)</i>	<i>Fuel (l)</i>	<i>Water (l)</i>	<i>Oil 50 (l)</i>	<i>Grease (kg)</i>	<i>Coolant (l)</i>
Bamako	0	510 600	–	6 000	720	720
Gao	0	0	–	0	0	0
Sévaré	0	88 500	–	1 000	120	120
Total	0	599 100	–	7 000	840	840

Update on engineering support

42. As noted in paragraph 10, the construction of the Joint Force temporary headquarters was completed during the reporting period. On 3 June, the inauguration took place in the presence of my Special Representative for Mali, the Head of the European Delegation in Mali, the Commander of the G5 Sahel Joint Force, and other partners. The project cost \$1.13 million.

Update on casualty and medical evacuation

43. MINUSMA did not receive any request to conduct casualty evacuations during the reporting period. The last casualty evacuation took place on 30 March 2020 as indicated in my previous report.

Update on exceptional food delivery

44. In August 2020, the Joint Force requested an exceptional air delivery from MINUSMA, as access to the Malian Defence and Security Forces camp in Boulikessi was inundated and the site was therefore not reachable by logistics convoys. The garrison inside the camp was reported to have very few days left of food. MINUSMA granted this request by airlifting 4,315 kg of food from Mopti to Boulikessi on 22 August with two Mil Mi-8 medium utility helicopters.

Update on the financial situation

45. The European Union has earmarked a total of 10 million euros for MINUSMA support to the Joint Force. As at 31 August, \$4.7 million or 76 per cent of the first disbursement of 5 million euros (\$6.2 million) transferred by the European Union has been spent. On 12 October, MINUSMA requested the European Union to disburse the remainder of the original earmarked funds, an additional 5 million euros as per the terms of the technical arrangement which specifies that a request for disbursement of the second tranche should be initiated after 70 per cent expenditure of the first disbursement. As the provisions of Security Council resolution 2531 (2020) are implemented, including regarding the procurement process for the transport of life support consumables to the five countries of operation of the Joint Force, there will be a need to ensure continued funding. At the time of finalizing the present report, the disbursement of the second tranche had not yet been effected.

46. Following the tripartite meeting in Nouakchott and the outcome of the technical working group between MINUSMA, the Joint Force and the European Union, the Mission estimated that an additional \$13.5 million is needed to support the Joint Force for one year, starting 1 January 2021. About \$13.2 million of this amount is for petrol, oil and lubricants, rations, medical evacuations, casualty evacuations, staff cost and indirect costs, while \$0.3 million will serve as a contingency provision to cover potential liability fees. The additional disbursement is a necessary requirement in order for MINUSMA to commence the procurement process.

B. Multilateral support

47. At the Summit of Heads of State of the Group of Five for the Sahel on 30 June in Nouakchott, the Heads of State of the five countries, along with the President of France, committed to intensifying counter-terrorism operations along the tri-State border areas of the Liptako-Gourma region, while reiterating their commitment to investigating allegations of human rights violations by security and defence forces, and ensuring that they adhere to the human rights and international humanitarian law compliance framework. The Summit called for the consolidation of the Sahel Coalition, as well as the determination of its institutional and governance architecture, notably the establishment of its secretariat and the alignment of programme pillars – the fight against terrorism, capacity-building for Sahelian forces, restoration of state authority and development assistance – in close collaboration with the G5 Sahel executive secretariat. On 8 October, a ministerial-level Sahel Coalition meeting took place to further operationalize the general secretariat of the Sahel Coalition.

48. During the reporting period, UNODC, in partnership with the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism and the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, conducted a legal analysis of the counter-terrorism legislation of Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger with the purpose of harmonizing national law with international legal instruments and obligations.

C. Regional and sub-regional initiatives

49. The African Union Commission (AUC) engaged with G5 Sahel Member States, ECOWAS, the Executive Secretary of the G5 Sahel and the African Union Military Staff Committee on the six-month deployment of the African Union Force of 3,000 troops to complement the efforts of the Joint Force in countering terrorism and violent extremism in the Sahel region. Consultations have been ongoing between the AUC, the G5 Sahel and ECOWAS on the development of the strategic concept, including funding mechanisms, and the concept of operations. During a meeting held in Addis

Ababa on 30 September, the Peace and Security Council of the African Union endorsed a strategic concept note and announced the operationalization of a technical working group assigned with all the tasks related to the planning and deployment of the 3,000 troops.

V. Support options going forward

50. In its resolution [2531 \(2020\)](#), the Security Council encourages MINUSMA to engage and consult with the G5 Sahel executive secretariat on the selection process for private contractors and encourages MINUSMA to pay attention to local content, in accordance with United Nations procurement rules and guiding principles. In addition, the technical arrangement between the G5 Sahel, the European Union and the United Nations requires the Joint Force to submit quarterly support requests for life support consumables to be procured by MINUSMA, providing detailed projections of the required quantities for a period of three months. In the context of kinetic operations in an asymmetric and frequently changing environment, such planning assumptions are often subject to change, which renders the provision of life support consumables by the United Nations challenging at times. The establishment of thorough and systematic joint planning mechanisms with the Joint Force leadership has facilitated the process to some extent, although the current support model provides limited room for more flexibility. Planning larger scale support, to be delivered by a third party requires even more rigorous planning, as well as predictable and sustainable funding. The current support model relies entirely on voluntary contributions by external partners.

51. To continue the current support, resolution [2531 \(2020\)](#) acknowledges that additional costs may be incurred when it comes to engaging external contractors for the delivery of food and fuel. The preliminary assessment by MINUSMA is that the remaining \$7.5 million would be insufficient to cover the cost of projected operations.

VI. Observations

52. The increase in the operational tempo of the Joint Force and the critical contribution by MINUSMA are encouraging amid seriously concerning security trends throughout the region. I commend the G5 Sahel for its efforts to address the current security challenges characterized by regular asymmetric attacks against national security forces, United Nations peacekeepers, humanitarian workers and local notabilities. The Joint Force plays a critical role within the regional and international security response to the activities of extremist armed groups in the Sahel, along with other cross-border challenges, including trafficking in persons, goods, weapons and drugs. I welcome the impending deployment of Task Force Takuba that will advise, assist and accompany conventional combat units of the Malian army in the fight against terrorist groups in the tri-border area, in coordination with G5 Sahel partners and other international actors on the ground. In the same vein, I commend the planned deployment of the African Union Force to complement the efforts of the Joint Force.

53. I also welcome the enhanced coordination mechanisms that the Coalition for the Sahel proposes to put into place, which will help all international partners to leverage their comparative strengths and to work together more effectively to ensure better efficiency and coordination of integrated initiatives encompassing development, humanitarian and security dimensions. It is essential that the Joint Force continue to receive the assistance it requires to carry out its mandated tasks. MINUSMA is finalizing the support arrangements under the new mandate which will help the Joint

Force sustain the momentum achieved to date. I however wish to once again stress that the current support model does not offer the predictable certainty required to fully operationalize the Joint Force and I reiterate my call for a more comprehensive model that ensures sustainable and predictable funding through assessed contributions.

54. I acknowledge the renewed commitment made by the Heads of State of the G5 Sahel and the President of France at their summit in Nouakchott and the assurances given by the Heads of State of the G5 Sahel that human rights violations in the fight against terrorism shall not be tolerated. Respect for international human rights and international humanitarian law during counter-terrorism operations has to be the basis for the protection of civilians and long-term stability. I therefore welcome the progress made by the Joint Force towards the establishment of the human rights and international humanitarian law compliance framework. To be effective, it needs to promptly be fully operationalized, including its police component and the Provost components of the national armies. Human rights violations and abuses allegedly perpetrated by members of the Joint Force and national forces must be fully investigated, and those responsible held accountable.

55. To operationalize the compliance framework at the field level, existing challenges, including financial, logistical and substantive security constraints, must be overcome in efforts to support Joint Force personnel to conduct in-person internal investigations into incidents. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights stands ready to lend its support in this regard. Moreover, it is critical that the Force undertakes its own preliminary investigations and the Force Commander maintains the capacity to take disciplinary action as appropriate, including the suspension and/or removal of units implicated in such incidents. Given the region's increasingly militarized context, strong accountability will reinforce the credibility of the Joint Force. Acceptance of the Joint Force at local level is critical in mitigating risks and accessing populations in need. I urge all parties to the counter-terrorism fight to comply with their legal obligation to protect civilians. I reiterate my plea to non-State armed groups and other stakeholders to uphold their obligations under international humanitarian law and to ensure unimpeded humanitarian access.

56. Security challenges in the Sahel remain deeply complex. Any initiative to stabilize the region will be successful only if the root causes of instability are addressed in a holistic, integrated and comprehensive manner. Underdevelopment, poverty, the lack of governance and lack of access to basic services and economic opportunities, exclusion and the effects of climate change must be addressed simultaneously. The humanitarian situation in the Sahel remains a particularly deep concern. Until people's basic needs are met, long term development and security initiatives cannot bear fruit. The international community has a moral obligation and shared responsibility to support the member States of the G5 Sahel in their commendable efforts to bring peace and sustainable development to the region and to alleviate the suffering of those who are most in need. I am deeply grateful to all donors and partners who have so consistently and generously come forward, most recently during the virtual conference on the humanitarian situation in the Sahel region on 20 October. I also express my deep gratitude to my Special Representative for Mali, Mahamat Saleh Annadif, and to all MINUSMA colleagues, who continue to spare no effort to ensure that the Mission provides support to the Joint Force, whenever it is requested.