



Security Council

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Letter dated 25 March 2021 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council

I am writing pursuant to paragraph 64 of Security Council resolution [2531 \(2020\)](#), by which the Council requested me to develop a long-term road map to assess the continued challenges to peace and security in Mali, envisaging a phased, coordinated and deliberate transition of the security responsibilities of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) without jeopardizing the stability of Mali and the region, and with a view to opening the way for a possible exit strategy for the Mission (see annex). As requested by the Council, the road map was developed in coordination with the United Nations country team and in consultation with relevant partners, including the Government of Mali and the Instance de Coordination au Mali.

The road map is organized around two phases: the first focuses on the key objectives to be achieved during the current political transition in Mali, which is expected to culminate in national elections; the second includes an outline of the major remaining challenges to be addressed following the completion of the political transition period, to allow MINUSMA to begin planning for a transition of security responsibilities and the progressive transfer of mandated responsibilities to the country team and national stakeholders, on the basis of a capacity mapping. At present, a third phase is also envisaged for the road map, which will be developed at a later stage and will consist of an exit strategy for the Mission that envisages a phased and coordinated transition of residual security responsibilities to national authorities.

I would be grateful if you could bring the present letter and its annex to the attention of the members of the Security Council.

(Signed) António Guterres



Annex

United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali: road map for mandate implementation

I. Background and approach

1. Following the coup d'état in Mali in August 2020, the Security Council, in its 15 October 2020 presidential statement,¹ requested the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) to support the political transition in Mali and the holding of inclusive, free, fair and credible elections. Taking into account the changed circumstances, the Mission has adopted a phased approach for the development of the road map. As I indicated in my letter to the Security Council dated 23 December 2020,² the first phase of the road map focuses on key objectives to be achieved during the political transition, which is expected to culminate in national elections. The second phase includes an outline of the major remaining challenges to be addressed following the completion of the political transition period, to allow MINUSMA to begin planning for a transition of security responsibilities and the progressive transfer of mandated responsibilities to the United Nations country team and national stakeholders, on the basis of a capacity mapping. The third phase will be developed at a later stage and will consist of an exit strategy for the Mission that envisages a phased and coordinated transition of residual security responsibilities to national authorities.

II. Guiding principles

2. In the implementation of its mandate, the Mission and its key partners will seek increased leadership and national ownership of the peace process by the Malian parties and other key stakeholders, as well as increased engagement of the Government and relevant local and community representatives. In keeping with the Action for Peacekeeping framework, specific focus shall be placed on facilitating inclusive political solutions, enhancing the protection and participation of women and improving the performance and safety and security of peacekeepers, while leveraging partnerships. A conditions-based approach and the principle of non-substitution will guide the provision of operational and logistics support by the Mission and the country team to the national authorities, the Malian Defence and Security Forces and the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel, including through the application of the human rights due diligence policy, as applicable.

III. Phase I: political transition

3. The political situation remains fraught as a result of cohesion challenges and a measure of distrust between the country's military leadership and the civilian political class. That situation is illustrated by growing public criticism over the perceived lack of inclusivity of the National Transition Council, the Parliament of the transition. Women's representation remains significantly under the minimum legal quota of 30 per cent. The pace of the political transition has been slow, indicating that there may be delays in the implementation of the Government's transition plan. The overall political situation is fragile and the Mission's good offices role will remain paramount to facilitating continued progress in the political and peace processes.

¹ S/PRST/2020/10.

² S/2020/1282.

4. Renewed emphasis will be put on the implementation of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali, building on the 18 December 2020 national road map for its implementation. On several occasions, the country's leadership has confirmed its adherence to the Agreement and its commitment to advancing its implementation. For the first time since the signing in 2015 of the Agreement, the signatory movements are represented in the Government and women are formally included in the Agreement Monitoring Committee. This presents an opportunity for enhanced collaboration and pragmatic solutions to advance the implementation of the Agreement in the interests of the country.

5. On 22 February, the National Transition Council adopted the Government's action plan for the transition period, which outlines a broad agenda of priority actions. Noting the Government's priorities as articulated in its road map and the action plan, MINUSMA and the country team have established an integrated approach to develop and implement focused, rapid actions in support of the core requirements for the political transition. This approach has developed an end state for 2022, with corresponding benchmarks and sectoral priorities, as outlined below.

IV. Phase I end state and benchmarks

6. By the end of the nationally determined period for political transition, constitutional order will have been restored, with a peaceful transfer of national governing authority to democratically elected authorities, in which women's representation and participation are increased. The national elections will be seen by the general public to have been credible overall, and the outcome broadly respected. Security will have been maintained, with advances in some areas resulting from increased trust between the parties, local peace initiatives, a more robust response by the national security and defence forces and the dismantlement of some militias in central Mali. The presence of the Malian State in northern and central Mali will not have decreased and will have advanced in population centres, permitting the coordinated deployment of State authorities. The Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali will remain the accepted framework for longer-term peace consolidation in Mali by all parties, including the new national Government, with its road map renewed and under active implementation.

Benchmarks

7. **Benchmark A.** Constitutional review is completed in accordance with the outcome of the national inclusive dialogue and reforms envisioned under the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali, also taking into account the recommendations of the 2018 review commission.

8. **Benchmark B.** Electoral reforms have been completed in such a way that credible national elections, as prescribed by the Transition Charter of Mali and in line with regional and international standards, are held in 2022, including in the newly created regions of Ménaka and Taoudenni, and result in a new, democratically elected President and Parliament, with increased participation and representation of women.

9. **Benchmark C.** The Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali will remain valid and has increased confidence among its signatories, with its revised road map under active implementation, leading to its renewed endorsement by the newly elected Government in 2022.

10. **Benchmark D.** All integrated elements that had completed the accelerated disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process have been redeployed to

northern Mali, on the basis of agreements between the signatory parties on the composition of the reconstituted units of the Malian Defence and Security Forces, and are engaged in concrete security roles. In addition, 2,000 members of the signatory armed groups have been vetted, trained and integrated into the Malian Defence and Security Forces.

11. **Benchmark E.** The restoration and extension of State civilian authority has been advanced sustainably in key population centres (Mopti, Sevare, Gao, Ansongo, Timbuktu, Taoudenni, Kidal and Ménaka) with the deployment of civil administrators (*prefets*) and judicial authorities (magistrates), in coordination with and supported by deployments to those regions of the Malian Defence and Security Forces.

12. **Benchmark F.** The legal framework for the regional territorial police has been completed and recruitment has begun, including the integration of a significant number of former members of the signatory groups.

13. **Benchmark G.** The operationalization of the Northern Development Zone has advanced, including through the establishment of the Interregional Advisory Council and the implementation of pilot projects in each of the five regions in northern Mali, and reflecting the effective transfer of State deconcentrated technical services to the subnational level.

14. **Benchmark H.** Civil society participation in the transition and peace processes, particularly for women and young people, has been broadened and a women's observatory has been established.

15. **Benchmark I.** The fight against impunity for serious crimes that risk destabilizing the peace process – including terrorism, transnational organized crime, violations and abuses of international human rights law and violations of international humanitarian law – has been advanced, by bringing to justice the individuals accused and by holding the corresponding trials.

V. Phase I priorities

A. Political transition, peace process and elections

16. The national action plan endorsed by the National Transition Council outlines a broad and ambitious agenda of six priority areas, with 275 specific actions proposed across 23 objectives. Considering the fragile and fragmented political situation and the need for inclusive and nationally owned political solutions, the prioritization of core tasks will be important within that broader agenda. With 12 months remaining in the political transition, many of the objectives proposed may not be achievable. In that regard, the Mission's continued good offices will be essential to enable a more focused, inclusive and prioritized transition and to mitigate disagreements.

17. MINUSMA should maintain its focus on the following priority political objectives in supporting accelerated implementation of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali, the Mission's primary strategic objective, with particular attention to the national road map of 18 December 2020, which includes support to institutional reforms:

(a) Continued support to the implementation of the Agreement by the signatory parties will require progress in key political, defence and security provisions of the Agreement. The deployment and operationalization of the reconstituted units to northern Mali, the establishment of the territorial police and the implementation of projects for the Northern Development Zone remain critical priorities in the coming months. The Mission should use its good offices to help

bridge the differences among the signatories, which will need to be addressed to ensure implementation in these areas;

(b) Electoral reforms are needed to ensure credible elections, most notably the establishment of a credible electoral management structure, independent from the Government, and awareness-raising on the eligibility of political parties to present candidates in local or national elections, as well as updates to the voter list. The completion of the territorial restructuring, including in the newly operationalized regions as well as electoral constituencies, will require a consensus approach based on inclusive, country-wide consultations;

(c) The basic documents necessary for the revision of the Constitution, as per the findings of the 2018 review commission and the 2019 national dialogue, are available to support progress on reforms. MINUSMA should focus on using its good offices and technical support on helping the transitional authorities deliver on its remaining timeline and ensuring consensus across the political arena;

(d) A key challenge in ensuring successful reforms and credible elections will continue to be advancing inclusivity, public communication, transparency and social dialogue for a consultative transition process. Inclusive solutions will require the increased participation of civil society, women and young people into the political and institutional reform processes, and progress towards the minimum 30 per cent quota target for women's representation. Focus will also be put on the monitoring of civic and democratic space ahead of elections to ensure a conducive environment for open debates and to build the population's trust in the electoral process.

B. Protection, security support and extension of State authority

18. The overall security situation in Mali will remain complex and could deteriorate further. In northern Mali, terrorist activity has increased in the Gao and Ménaka regions, and the Coordination des mouvements de l'Azawad is asserting its control and providing security in the wider areas of the Timbuktu and Kidal regions, against a backdrop of limited State presence and the fracturing of the coalition with Plateforme. Terrorist groups are also exploiting the institutional void to expand their influence southward. The control of major trafficking routes remains the main incentive to take up arms. Economic drivers of conflict remain difficult to address because the motives of the groups are concealed by idealistic, political or religious rhetoric.

19. In central Mali, violence across community lines continues to claim lives and is exploited by extremist groups, with the Bandiagara, Bankass and Koro *cercles* most affected. Terrorist groups have proliferated and asserted their presence in several areas in the centre. The areas affected have reported lower levels of violence and intercommunity clashes, as the infiltrated communities are mostly homogenous. The threat of improvised explosive devices remains high in the centre and in particular along the Kona-Gao axis, and the presence of terrorist groups restricts the freedom of movement for the national defence and security forces and international forces, who remain the main targets of improvised explosive device attacks, with the civilian population also suffering significant casualties. An effective response by the Mission in central Mali will require clarity of vision by the transitional government on how to address those challenges in this most vulnerable part of the country, as well as close coordination with all national, regional and international stakeholders.

20. Terrorism and asymmetric threats, as well as intercommunal violence, will have a negative impact on nationally led political processes and the implementation of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali, as well as regional and local reconciliation initiatives. Those security challenges also continue to pose a significant threat to MINUSMA personnel, initiatives and operations in support of the protection

of civilians, and to the freedom of movement of national and international stakeholders.

21. In that regard, the full operationalization of the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel remains a necessary and key step in stabilizing the security situation in central and northern Mali and therefore paving the way for the return and extension of State authority across those areas, including through its defence and security forces as well as its civilian administrative services. Pending a sustainable solution regarding the support to the Joint Force, as proposed by the Secretary-General in his 2017 report (S/2017/811), MINUSMA should continue to provide logistical support to the Joint Force, in line with Security Council resolution [2531 \(2020\)](#).

22. The following priority objectives should be pursued:

(a) In northern Mali, MINUSMA should continue to protect key population centres, create space for the peace process to unfold and prepare the ground for and facilitate the return of State authority. The completion of the accelerated disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process, the integration of former combatants of the signatory movements into the Malian Defence and Security Forces, and the redeployment of reconstituted units to northern Mali, including through operational, logistical and transportation support, will be key areas of focus for the Mission, as well as the establishment of the territorial police;

(b) MINUSMA, together with the country team, should support the establishment of a conducive security environment for the holding of credible elections in northern and central Mali, the return of refugees and internally displaced persons and the provision of basic social services to the population;

(c) MINUSMA should continue to support the Malian authorities in articulating the vision and implementation of a politically led stabilization strategy for the centre. Added focus will be put on supporting the national and local conflict response and reconciliation efforts in the centre. That approach will also entail more frequent coordinated and integrated operations in support of physical protection and to ensure humanitarian access, in coordination as relevant with the country team, and increased use of early warning and rapid response mechanisms. Emphasis on support to the *Cadre politique pour la gestion de la crise du centre* and the regional *Cadres de concertation* in the centre will remain a priority for conflict prevention and reconciliation processes;

(d) MINUSMA should continue to support the implementation of the nationally led community rehabilitation programme aimed at dismantling self-defence groups in the centre. Moreover, the Mission will continue to advance community violence reduction programming to prevent the recruitment of young people into armed groups, build community resilience and mitigate local violence. Those efforts will serve to reduce the influence and impact of armed groups in the centre with political and reconciliation processes;

(e) In areas of limited State presence, MINUSMA should continue to take active steps to anticipate, deter and effectively respond to threats to the civilian population, notably in the north and centre of Mali, through a comprehensive and integrated approach, while also mitigating the risk to civilians before, during and after any military or police operation. To that end, the Mission will continue to implement its adaptation plan, with a view to integrating all mission components and increasing its protected mobility, agility and flexibility. The Mission should also support the redeployment of the national army in the centre and the development of community policing capacities in national security and police forces.

C. Rule of law, human rights and the fight against impunity

23. Pervasive impunity related to serious human rights violations and abuses, corruption, terrorism and transnational organized crime remains a major concern in Mali. The role of MINUSMA in promoting and protecting human rights, the rule of law and the fight against impunity will remain vital. The criminal justice system of Mali remains ill-equipped to deal with the complexity and high volume of crimes, including terrorism trials as well as transnational organized crimes and corruption cases. In addition, support to military justice may encounter delays and hurdles owing to its sensitivity and the current legal framework. In 2020, the Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission initiated public hearings to investigate all gross human rights violations committed in Mali between 1960 and 2013 and their root causes, but these were delayed owing to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. The adoption of the national reconciliation charter and the gender-sensitive national reparations policy is included in the Government's action plan.

24. Widespread discontent about impunity has fed community grievances against the State, whether in relation to unchecked human rights abuses by terrorist armed groups, including sexual and gender-based violence, abuses stemming from intercommunal violence, or violations by Malian security forces in retaliation for perceived support for or affiliation with terrorist groups. The promotion and protection of human rights will remain an essential prevention tool to the efforts of the United Nations, with MINUSMA investigating allegations and reporting on human rights violations. Notable attention should be paid to the adoption and strengthening of mechanisms and initiatives to prevent and address serious crimes, including human rights violations and abuses, with particular attention given to grave violations against children and conflict-related sexual violence; and to continuing to strengthen the capacity of national institutions, civil society and human rights defenders with regard to promoting and protecting human rights.

25. Accordingly, the following priority objectives should be pursued:

(a) Support from MINUSMA to promote and protect human rights should continue to be essential, with prioritized efforts to monitor, document and report on violations and abuses of human rights and international humanitarian law and to contribute to efforts to prevent such violations and abuses, including violations by the Malian Defence and Security Forces;

(b) In parallel, MINUSMA should continue its support to judicial reform, including criminal law reform, military justice reform, land reform and reform in favour of a constructive complementarity between formal and traditional justice, in coordination with efforts to deploy and strengthen judicial and prison capacities. It will also be important to enhance the independence of the judiciary and complete the separation of the constitutional court from the judiciary system, which was one of the triggers of the current political crisis;

(c) MINUSMA should also continue to support the Malian transitional justice mechanism, ensuring that its processes are strengthened and operate in accordance with human rights standards and other international obligations;

(d) Therefore, the ongoing work on strengthening law enforcement, judicial and corrections institutions, such as the specialized judicial unit on terrorism and transnational organized crime, as well as on developing a national prosecutorial strategy for crimes that risk destabilizing the peace process and on updating relevant codes of conduct for justice actors to prevent and fight corruption will continue to be priorities during the political transition. MINUSMA should also further assist Malian parties to follow up on the recommendations of a national platform to promote judicial

integrity and the adhesion of the International Commission of Enquiry on Mali to the Global Judicial Integrity Network.

D. Social protection and basic social services

26. During the transition period, MINUSMA and the country team should, with reference to the delineation of responsibilities and comparative advantages as set out in the integrated strategic framework, the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework and the humanitarian response plan, continue to support the delivery of basic services to vulnerable populations in key regions, in line with the national priorities set in the Government's road map for the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali and with the objectives laid out in the strategic framework for economic recovery and sustainable development (*Cadre stratégique pour la relance économique et le développement durable*) for the period 2019–2023.

27. The interventions of the country team and MINUSMA should aim to strengthen social protection and provide equitable access to quality basic social services, with a particular focus on vulnerable groups, including women, children and young people. An equal, inclusive, gender-sensitive and gender-responsive approach will be at the forefront in the implementation of socioeconomic programmes. Through a coordinated country team approach, emphasis will be placed on the following three main objectives:

(a) Support the implementation of the development provisions of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali and the national stabilization strategy for the centre. MINUSMA and the country team should also support the Government's efforts for the operationalization of the Northern Development Zone and the sustainable development fund. Furthermore, initiatives will be taken to enhance economic generation through agriculture and farming to strengthen economic resilience;

(b) Strengthen social sector systems at the national and subnational levels for community resilience and inclusive, gender-sensitive and sustainable socioeconomic development. Emphasis will be placed on extending the social protection coverage and services so that essential services are available to all. As such, the country team should support, among other things, the registration of additional households under the unified social registry, to support the most vulnerable households;

(c) Provide continued support to strengthen equitable access to quality basic social services for women and children and other vulnerable groups at risk of being left behind, based on their specific needs by age and gender. The country team should support the delivery and enhancement of health care, including immunization programmes for children, as well as the provision and improvement of education programmes, family planning facilities and Water, Sanitation and Hygiene for All programmes. As part of those initiatives, school feeding programmes for boys and girls and cash transfer packages to some 100,000 additional vulnerable households will be carried out.

VI. Roadmap phase II: major remaining challenges to be addressed following the completion of the political transition period

28. MINUSMA does not expect progress to be linear during the first phase of political transition. While progress towards constitutional and electoral reforms is essential for credible elections, the transitional government is unlikely to complete

the full reform agenda outlined in the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali, notably on territorial restructuring – a politically sensitive process – and security and defence measures. Political processes and increased restoration of State authorities are expected to have advanced stabilization prospects in the centre, while asymmetric and terrorist threats will nevertheless have increased – despite continued national and international efforts to fight terrorism. Continued terrorist activity will continue to pose significant challenges to MINUSMA and national authorities.

29. Phase II of the MINUSMA road map should thus focus on identifying and addressing the major remaining challenges, following the end of the political transition period, that would affect the Mission's plans for a phased and coordinated withdrawal of security support to national authorities and the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel, as well as the transfer of non-security responsibilities to the country team and other national stakeholders according to their capacities.

VII. Phase II challenges

A. Longer-term governance reform processes

30. The political protests in Mali, which culminated in the coup d'état of August 2020, brought again to the forefront the need for extensive political reforms to tackle the underlying structural causes for political and social tensions, conflict and violence in Mali. In the light of the ambitious reform agenda of the transitional government and the short time frame of the transition, it is unlikely that all institutional reforms outlined in the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali will be tackled. Any newly elected Government will be required to pursue a broad reform agenda and to take up and implement any outstanding issues.

31. The 18 December road map presents an ambitious series of actions, some of which may extend beyond the transition period, as the national authorities have stated. The full, equal, effective and meaningful participation of women in the political processes in Mali in accordance with national law 2015-052 will remain a challenge at the national and local levels, although progress is likely to have been achieved at the level of the Agreement Monitoring Committee.

32. Following key political reforms at the national level, the Malian authorities can move to enhancing the decentralization of governance, including the full and effective functioning of the Haut conseil des collectivités, by ensuring representation of traditional authorities, women and young people in that consultation mechanism. An effective decentralization process will need to ensure greater representation for and participation by the northern populations, as envisaged in the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali, but should be pursued in coordination with country-wide popular consultations to ensure that all regions feel adequately represented and to avoid the creation of new grievances. The effective functioning of national and local State institutions in terms of human, technical and financial resources will remain a major cause of concern.

33. For the northern regions, the continued implementation of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali and their increased political inclusion will remain a key issue. To increase northern representation in State bodies, civilian officials of the signatory armed movements need to be adequately integrated into the public administration and local public service functions. The signatory armed movements could also explore different ways of actively participating in politics, be it through having members of their movements run as independent candidates in elections or by transforming their movements into political parties. For the effective implementation of the Agreement, the following reforms will be crucial to help restore the trust of the

population in State institutions: (a) a regulatory framework to guide fiscal decentralization, including the transfer of centralized deconcentrated State services to the local government level (article 16); (b) the operationalization of the Northern Development Zone (article 33); (c) the transfer of 30 per cent of national budgetary income to territorial collectivities (article 14); and (d) the allocation of a percentage of the revenues from exploitation of natural resources (article 15).

B. Terrorism and transnational crime

34. On the security front, Mali will continue to face significant security challenges following the national elections in 2022. The relative political stability that will be brought about by elected institutions will not translate immediately into improved security in the central and northern regions of the country.

35. In the northern regions, signatory armed groups, notably the Coordination des mouvements de l'Azawad, will continue to act as security providers, while terrorist armed groups' activities will continue unabated. Asymmetric attacks, including improvised explosive devices, targeting national and international forces deployed in the north, will likely dominate the security environment in spite of national and international efforts to combat terrorism, as it will take more time for the Malian Defence and Security Forces to strengthen their capacity to plan and conduct effective operations and hold the ground thereafter. The effectiveness of Malian Defence and Security Forces actions will also depend to a large extent on: (a) tangible progress in the implementation of the security and development provisions of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali; (b) reinforcement of the capacity of the criminal justice chain (police, courts and prisons) in the north and centre as regards arrests, detention and prosecution of terrorist suspects; and (d) the upholding of human rights.

36. On the issue of dialogue, especially with some terrorist organizations, progress will be contingent on political will, broad support from across the political spectrum and the general population and the involvement of the country's neighbouring countries and bilateral partners. In addition, the security outlook in the north could improve if: (a) French forces maintain a sufficient deterrent presence along with the full deployment of the European Takuba Task Force; (b) effective on-the-ground European Union Training Mission mentoring support for national units in northern and central Mali; and (c) a more autonomous and operational Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel.

37. In the centre, the activities of militias and terrorist armed groups will continue to fuel, aggravate and manipulate pre-existing ethnic and community tensions, resulting in increasing cycles of intercommunity and intracommunity violence. These variations in violence along ethnic and community lines will remain a serious challenge to stability and security, unless and until a comprehensive Government-led strategy is implemented to address the political, security and development root causes of the crisis. A noticeable reduction in the level of violence could occur if the Government were to implement its community rehabilitation programme targeting the dismantling of militia groups as part of such a larger strategy to address the situation in the centre. To be sustainable, such a programme would require a strong buy-in from the Government, the security apparatus, the local population and international partners. Moreover, efforts should be complemented by community-based initiatives aimed at preventing the recruitment of young at-risk people and building community resilience.

38. As regards the activities of extremist groups that are likely to persist in the post-electoral period, a combination of dialogue, development projects and military action will be needed. Sustained support for the political dialogue will be critical to maintain

the political momentum and ensure engagement, public participation and acceptance of the processes.

39. The issue of transnational organized crime and its interconnections with extremist groups and local power structures in the north and the centre will demand concerted and coordinated action from the Government of Mali and regional and international partners. Moreover, support needs to continue for the implementation of the Government's national strategy and action plan for the prevention of radicalization and violent extremism, including in prison settings.

40. With respect to the extension of State authority, the deployment of administrative, security, judicial and social services will remain a daunting challenge for the Government. The role of MINUSMA in supporting the deployment of the reconstituted Malian Defence and Security Forces units to the north and the extension of the State apparatus in the centre will largely depend on political will from the Government and signatory armed groups, as well as the availability of national funds and financial support from donors. Furthermore, progress in the extension of State authority will be affected by whether the new Government opts for a linear process (i.e. from security to local administration to social service delivery) or dynamic one, involving simultaneous and complementary interventions in the areas of security, governance and provision of basic social services. A dynamic approach to the extension of State authority, with a strong involvement and coordination of all concerned stakeholders, including a fully operational Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel, may offer better prospects of sustainable results. It is anticipated that, for its part, MINUSMA will continue to implement integrated security, reconciliation and stabilization responses to local conflicts deemed ripe for resolution, working closely with the regional reconciliation support groups and local authorities.

C. Human rights violations, rule of law and impunity

41. In the sphere of human rights and rule of law, outstanding challenges in phase II will likely include: (a) the political will to tackle impunity, especially accountability for violations and abuses of human rights; (b) violations of international humanitarian law, as well as other destabilizing crimes (e.g., terrorism and transnational organized crime); (c) State capacity to challenge the same, including through judicial reform and reinforcement of its capacity to respect international human rights norms and standards, in particular with regard to women's rights; and (d) progress on the fight against corruption, including in justice and security sectors and on a meaningful reconciliation process. Access to justice for large parts of the population will remain a major challenge, in particular for women, owing to traditional gender inequalities and discriminatory laws.

42. Specifically, in relation to human rights and serious crimes, it is unclear whether during phase I the transitional government will be in a position to hold perpetrators of human rights violations to account. Major challenges also lie in the difficulty for justice actors to gain access to the zones where attacks take place and where the communities in need of justice services live. Moreover, justice actors have difficulty in deploying to the zones where attacks against peacekeepers take place and remain dependent on MINUSMA for access to investigation sites and evidence, including witnesses and witness protection. The Malian population's lack of confidence in the justice system, including for reasons related to alleged corruption and economic and financial crimes, may constitute another remaining challenge to address.

D. Lack of development and limited basic services in northern Mali

43. The following key challenges to development and contributors to the deteriorating humanitarian situation will persist beyond the political transition period: (a) food insecurity; (b) access to basic social services, including social protection; (c) gender-based violence; (d) assistance to internally displaced people, host communities and refugees towards durable solutions; and (e) adapting to climate change. Addressing the root causes of conflict will require inclusive and sustainable socioeconomic development as well as the provision of appropriate responses to address the needs of vulnerable communities, including young people, women and children, but will be heavily affected by the political and security context. The provision of government services, including in relation to education, health or other public services, including through the physical presence of the different departments at the community, *cercle* and regional levels, as well as the creation of peace dividends, is crucial for the peacebuilding process as it will contribute to building trust between the national Government and citizens.

44. It will also be essential to strengthen, in an integrated manner, the capacities of the authorities at the national, regional and local levels to adequately protect the most vulnerable populations in the country, given the current multidimensional poverty rate of 78 per cent. A prioritization of economic activities that help to consolidate stability, provide tangible results and enhance income generation will be crucial. Food security in the country, where 53 per cent of the population resides in rural areas, remains a priority. To that end, the country team, in line with national government strategic frameworks, will continue to promote a sustainable, innovative and competitive agricultural sector and the development of a competitive industry.

45. COVID-19 and other epidemics have slowed down the progress made in the health sector since 2015, deepening difficulties for people to gain access to health-care services. More than 50 per cent of the already limited workforce in health facilities has been mobilized towards the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which has had a damaging effect on other areas of health care. Over 4 million people still do not have access to an improved water source, and more than 12 million people lack access to basic sanitation, representing 69 per cent of the population, with rural areas being the most affected.

VIII. Conclusion and next steps

46. Considering the challenges identified above, the conditions for a phased, coordinated and deliberate transition of the Mission security responsibilities without jeopardizing the stability of Mali and the region will not be in place by the end of the political transition. It would therefore be premature to envisage any drawdown or transition of security responsibilities from MINUSMA to national defence and security forces in the period immediately following the elections. Efforts should rather focus on addressing the challenges, with a view to improving the political and security conditions required for a gradual withdrawal of MINUSMA security support forces, with an emphasis on Government-led initiatives and heightened regional cooperation. The asymmetric threat in the centre will continue to have significant negative impacts on the ability of the national and international stakeholders to implement their activities. Given the resources and capacities of MINUSMA and the increased threat environment, a reassessment of the roles and responsibilities of national, regional and international security stakeholders, as well as a capacity mapping of the country team, will be imperative before embarking on the development of an exit strategy.