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Provisional

President: Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield/Mr. Mills. (United States of America)

Members:

Albania	Ms. Dautllari
Brazil	Mr. De Almeida Filho
China	Mr. Zhang Jun
France	Mr. De Rivière
Gabon	Ms. Bongo
Ghana	Mr. Agyeman
India	Mr. Raguttahalli
Ireland	Ms. Moran
Kenya	Mrs. Toroitich
Mexico	Mr. De la Fuente Ramírez
Norway	Ms. Juul
Russian Federation	Ms. Evstigneeva
United Arab Emirates	Mrs. Nusseibeh
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Dame Barbara Woodward

Agenda

Peace and security in Africa

Report of the Secretary-General on the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel (S/2022/382)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Expression of sympathy on the passing of His Highness Sheikh Khalifa Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, President of the United Arab Emirates

The President: At the outset of the meeting, on behalf of the Security Council, I would like to express our heartfelt condolences on the passing of His Highness Sheikh Khalifa Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, a leader and a key figure in the history of his country, the United Arab Emirates. On this occasion, I want to express the Council's deepest sympathy to the Government and the people of the United Arab Emirates.

On behalf of the Council, I ask that all here stand and observe a minute of silence in memory of His Highness.

The members of the Security Council observed a minute of silence.

The President: I now call on the representative of the United Arab Emirates.

Mrs. Nusseibeh (United Arab Emirates): I thank you, Madam President, for allowing me to say a few words at a time of deep mourning in my country. And I would like to thank all Council members for their heartfelt condolences and solidarity with the Government and the people of the United Arab Emirates on the passing of our late President His Highness Sheikh Khalifa Bin Zayed Al Nahyan last Friday. I would also like to thank the United States for holding this moment of silence under its presidency to honour his life and work.

The United Arab Emirates has lost a distinguished leader and a visionary man. Sheikh Khalifa devoted his life to his people and country and inspired his nation with his dedication, wisdom and humility. He was a man of action who leaves behind an extraordinary legacy in his country, the wider region and around the world. He was a strong advocate for diplomacy, multilateralism and mediation, and he made brave decisions that opened up opportunities for peace in a region that has witnessed great turmoil. Sheikh Khalifa was also a true champion of the most vulnerable, ensuring that humanitarian aid and support were always extended to those most in need, regardless of their race, colour or creed. Under his guidance, the United Arab Emirates further promoted its values of tolerance, empathy and compassion globally.

At home, Sheikh Khalifa was a true force for change. During his tenure as President, a young country on its development journey sent its first astronaut to the International Space Station and an orbiter to the atmosphere of Mars and began exploring the possibilities of space. We hosted the first-ever visit by the Pope to the Arabian peninsula, welcomed more than 24 million visitors from around the world to Expo 2020 and won the bid to host the 2008 Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. Our domestic development journey has continued to make enormous strides, with leaps in the area of artificial intelligence and innovation across fields as diverse as climate change, the peaceful uses of nuclear energy and the empowerment of youth and women. Most significantly, and as part of his political empowerment programme, the Federal National Council — our Parliament — held its first elections in 2005, and today 50 per cent of its representatives are women.

But perhaps more important than any of those achievements as a great statesman is the fact that he was a truly kind man who cared deeply about other people. That has been evident in the outpouring of grief from the people of the United Arab Emirates, but also in the tributes we have heard from both colleagues in New York and the stream of dignitaries who have come to pay their respects in Abu Dhabi. We are sincerely grateful for the kindness that others have shown to us as we mourn.

Sheikh Khalifa followed in the path of the United Arab Emirates' founding father, the late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, who once said that a leader must bear in mind that he has to perform his duties, shoulder his responsibilities and make use of a country's God-given wealth for its people's welfare, happiness, security and stability. Those words will remain an inspiration for the Government of the United Arab Emirates and for the next generation of our people, under the leadership of the elected President of the United Arab Emirates, His Highness Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan.

I thank you once again for your expression of support and your condolences, Madam President.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Peace and security in Africa

Report of the Secretary-General on the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel (S/2022/382)

The President: In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Ms. Martha Ama Akyaa Pobe, Assistant Secretary-General for Africa in the Departments of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and Peace Operations; Mr. Eric Tiaré, Executive Secretary of the Group of Five for the Sahel; and Ms. Solange Bandiaky-Badji, Coordinator and President of the Rights and Resources Initiative/Group.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2022/382, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel.

I now give the floor to Ms. Pobe.

Ms. Pobe (*spoke in French*): I thank members for giving me the opportunity to address the Council.

Since the last meeting of the Security Council on the Sahel (see S/PV.8903), the security situation in the region has deteriorated. Terrorism and insecurity continue to spread, devastating the lives of millions of people. The main victims of these acts of terrorism are often civilians, and the suffering and losses that they have endured at the hands of terrorist groups are indescribable. However, future generations are also paying a price. Food insecurity, school closures and the disintegration of entire communities are all direct consequences of this protracted instability and have a lasting impact, especially on young people, who are finding themselves without opportunities or prospects.

(*spoke in English*)

Against that backdrop, the Malian transition authorities' decision on 15 May to withdraw from the Group of Five for the Sahel (G-5 Sahel) and its Joint Force is both unfortunate and regrettable. The Joint Force was created in 2017 by the Heads of State of the G-5 Sahel, born of a shared vision and their desire to take their fate into their own hands and combat terrorism in the Sahel head-on. However, and as the Secretary-General notes in his report (S/2022/382), the

current challenging political and security dynamics in the Sahel in general, and the uncertain outcomes of the transitions in Mali and Burkina Faso in particular, had already affected the operationalization of the G-5 Sahel Joint Force, which has significantly slowed.

The G-5 Sahel has not convened a high-level political meeting since November 2021. Its Defence and Security Committee, the body that provides immediate strategic guidance to the Joint Force leadership, has also not met in more than six months. Considering that, we commend the efforts by the Joint Force Commander, General Bikimo, to continue planning and conducting Joint Force operations, particularly in the central sector, which encompasses the Liptako-Gourma countries and is most affected by the spread of terrorism. Since the Security Council last met to discuss this issue, in November 2021, the Joint Force has been able to carry out operations in all three of its sectors, thanks to its commander's commitment and leadership. However, it has been without the participation of the Malian battalions. It remains to be seen how Mali's decision to leave the G-5 Sahel and its Joint Force will further affect the organization and dynamics in the region. It is certainly a step backward for the Sahel.

The United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) has provided support to the Joint Force and will continue that as long as it is mandated to do so by the Council. The Mission has been working with contractors to deliver life-support consumables to the Joint Force contingents and will honour support requests received by the other four contingents outside Mali. I would also like to express gratitude for the European Union's continued financial support, which has made the work of MINUSMA possible.

Against the backdrop of the protracted political and security crises in the region, protecting the most vulnerable has become ever more important. However, and as the Secretary-General notes in his report, we are deeply concerned about the deteriorating human rights situation in the region and the reports of serious violations committed against civilians, both by terrorist armed groups and also reportedly by armed and security forces in the region. Now more than ever, the countries in the region need to step up their efforts to uphold and protect human rights. Uprooting terrorist groups that are often deeply enmeshed or embedded within communities is uniquely challenging in the Sahel and has made it immensely difficult to carry out counter-

terrorism operations. But if civilians fall victim to such operations, those very efforts will be pointless. Not only can they cause immeasurable human suffering, they also seriously undermine trust in the State and fuel the vicious cycle of further radicalization.

All of this goes to show that security efforts alone are not sufficient to address the crisis in the Sahel. A holistic approach is required — one that honours the primacy of politics, addresses the root causes of poverty and exclusion and seeks to provide opportunities and fulfilling lives for the many young people in the region. For that to happen, the State must be closer to the people and at one with them, while providing security and basic services to communities on the periphery as well. In the coming months, it will be crucial for stakeholders in the region to come to a consensus on how best to bring the transitions in Mali and Burkina Faso to a swift conclusion and in a manner that addresses the grievances of the populations of both countries. At the same time, the countries of the region will have to come together, bridge their differences and maintain dialogue to pursue their common security objectives. We remain deeply committed to supporting the region and the G-5 Sahel in that endeavour.

Beyond our continued support to the existing efforts to stabilize the Sahel, it is perhaps time to rethink our approaches and change the way we do our work. We need innovative approaches in the face of the constantly evolving tactics of terrorist groups, whose influence keeps expanding. For the past five years, the international community, donors and partners have struggled to reach a consensus on the most effective support mechanism for a collective security response in the Sahel. That has proved to be a significant obstacle to the operationalization of the Joint Force. And the lack of consensus persists, despite the recognition by all that the terrorist onslaught in the Sahel constitutes a slow-burning mortal threat to international peace and security.

In the light of the growing complexity of the crisis facing the Sahel, it is now more urgent than ever to act. That is why the Secretary-General and the Chairperson of the African Union Commission have committed the African Union Commission and the United Nations Secretariat to jointly carrying out a strategic assessment of security and governance initiatives in the Sahel, with the objective of strengthening support to the G-5 Sahel, its Joint Force and other security and governance initiatives in the region. That assessment

will be conducted in close collaboration with the Economic Community of West African States and the G-5 Sahel and will also focus on innovative ways to mobilize sustainable resourcing for those regional initiatives. An independent high-level panel on security and development in the Sahel, to be chaired by a former President of the Niger, His Excellency Mr. Mahamadou Issoufou, will oversee the independent strategic assessment. We look forward to the outcomes of that independent assessment and remain convinced that working together is crucial to overcoming the challenges facing the Sahel.

The President: I thank Ms. Pobee for her briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Tiaré.

Mr. Tiaré (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I join the members of the Security Council in expressing our sincere condolences to the United Arab Emirates following the passing of its President.

It is a pleasure to take the floor to brief the members of the Council on the latest developments in the Group of Five for the Sahel (G-5 Sahel) countries.

In a communiqué dated 15 May, the Government of Mali made known to the international community its decision to withdraw from all of the bodies of the G-5 Sahel. That decision was a great surprise because Mali had noted that it would suspend its participation in the bodies of the G-5 Sahel, including the Joint Force, if there were no progress on the issue of Mali's presidency of the G-5 Sahel.

We are deeply saddened by this regrettable decision to fully withdraw rather than suspend its participation, because the G-5 Sahel is a family of five countries — Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania, the Niger and Chad — that has been working together since the signing of the 19 December 2014 convention. I note that the G-5 Sahel is an institutional regional coordination and monitoring framework — with the voluntary participation of each of its member States — that pursues two main objectives: combating terrorism and ensuring socioeconomic development in the G-5 Sahel space.

This original idea is based on the understanding that no country alone could combat terrorism and promote development unless it pooled its human, financial and material resources with others. In the area of development, the relevant main G-5 Sahel implementation programmes and projects include the

security and development strategy and the Priority Investment Programme, the first phase of which covers the period 2019 to 2022.

To complement that — given the deterioration in the security situation in the G-5 Sahel space — an integrated priority action framework was adopted in February 2020 to provide greater efficiency, with the aim of carrying out swift, realistic, measurable and flexible efforts on security and development aspects in priority areas, including in the humanitarian, governance and reconciliation areas. However, despite the goodwill of our partners and their support, growing insecurity and the coronavirus disease pandemic have hampered our ability to carry out such activities.

In the area of combating terrorism, G-5 Sahel Joint Force was established in 2017 — as noted by Ms. Pobee — under the Malian presidency, with general headquarters in Bamako. According to its concept of operations, it conducts joint operations in the central, western and eastern areas and consists of approximately 55,000 troops grouped into seven battalions. In the past, it had been supported in the centre region by an eighth battalion, the Chadian battalion, based in Téra, in the Niger, which withdrew at the beginning of April. Given the way it operates and the new context in the G-5 Sahel space with the ongoing deterioration in the security situation, a review of the concept of operations has been considered; however, the military body has not yet been able to meet.

We thank the Secretary-General for the support that he has always provided to the G-5 Sahel and the Joint Force within the Security Council, in which he has always underscored the need to provide material and financial support in order to strengthen the G-5 Sahel. The Heads of State of the G-5 Sahel have always appealed to the United Nations to support the Joint Force because our countries are fighting not only in our own interests, but also in the interest of international peace and security.

Within the Security Council itself, the three African countries that are non-permanent members have always advocated for a positive stance towards the Joint Force that would allow it to meet the challenges, as the support provided by the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali remains below our expectations. In 2021, the Council even visited the Niger and worked with Major General Bikimo, who recalled the challenges facing the Joint Force. The most recent visit by the Secretary-General to West Africa,

at the beginning of May, notably to the Niger again, made it possible to come to grips with the realities of the Sahel and served as the occasion to appoint the former President of the Niger, Mr. Mahamadou Issoufou, to lead the independent high-level group in charge of the joint strategic assessment. The G-5 Sahel will participate in that assessment and hopes that its main components will enable it to better define a better security, governance and cooperation architecture in order to ensure the optimal use of resources.

Despite challenges and limitations, the Joint Force has been able to carry out numerous operations in the centre, east and west areas since the end of 2019. The new campaign plan currently being approved provides for a total of eight major operations in the three areas. In total, 26 operations have been carried out since the end of 2019.

In the context of progress in its implementation, permanent operational procedures for internal investigations have been established. And a compliance framework has been put in place to guide the Joint Force so as to ensure respect for human rights and international humanitarian law.

The G-5 Sahel countries are waging a fight on two fronts — security and development. On the political level, the unconstitutional changes that have taken place in three of the five G-5 Sahel countries, as well as the sanctions imposed on some of those countries, have in no way contributed to harmony within the G-5 Sahel family. Tensions have even arisen with certain partners. One of the consequences of that internal crisis within the G-5 Sahel is the difficulty in convening the organization's bodies, in particular the eighth summit, in February, during which Mali should have assumed the rotating presidency.

We are now facing an unprecedented and unexpected situation with regard to the decision of the Malian Government to withdraw, and the leaders of the other member States will certainly take initiatives in the coming days in order to address that diligently.

Nevertheless, we still believe that anything is possible, in the good sense of the phrase, and we are therefore appealing to the United Nations to become even more involved in supporting the G-5 Sahel in its fight against terrorism and for development, for the risks of the security crisis spreading to the Gulf countries are very great — and they are already visible.

The President: I thank Mr. Tiaré for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Bandiaky-Badji.

Ms. Bandiaky-Badji: Today I would like to talk about the links between climate change and the conflict in the Group of Five for the Sahel (G-5 Sahel) countries.

In that connection, I have three main questions. First, what impacts is climate change having on the G-5 Sahel countries? Secondly, how is climate change linked to conflict and how is it exacerbating conflict in the Sahel? And thirdly, why is it important to take climate change into account in developing peacebuilding strategies in the Sahel? I would like to end by issuing a call to action for climate justice and for sustainable peace in the G-5 Sahel countries.

Research has shown that the G-5 Sahel countries are among the 20 per cent most vulnerable to climate-change risks. Some of the impacts felt across the region include extreme weather events, such as droughts, floods, erratic rainfall and rising temperatures, the depletion of natural resources, food and water insecurity, increasing disease outbreaks, displacement and migration.

For example, torrential rains affected more than half a million people in the Niger in 2020, and up to 10 million people are facing starvation owing to drought.

Climate shocks and chronic food crises in the Sahel region also continue to weaken women's coping mechanisms and their economic resiliency capacities as they limit access to income and assets.

While it is understood that conflict is driven by the wider historical, socioeconomic and political context, including internal factors related to demographic, economic, social, governance and environmental factors, trying to understand the conflict dynamics in vulnerable countries in the Sahel without considering the impact of climate change could result in an incomplete and flawed analysis. Climate change affects the availability, distribution and quality of natural resources, which can escalate conflicts over those resources.

Land tenure dynamics need to be a central frame of analysis on conflict in the Sahel. The importance of understanding and implementing rural land tenure and rules for the management of natural resources in relation to localized conflict in the Sahel is critical because pressure for land has its greatest impact in areas held under customary tenure. While there have been legislative shifts in some countries, challenges remain in legal weaknesses, conflicts of customary law

and statutory law, and poor implementation of legal reform. For instance, the incomplete institutionalization of the commonly accepted rules on rural land tenure and the management of natural resources have allowed many conflicts over natural resources to continue. In the Niger, Burkina Faso and Mali, increasing land pressure and insecure land tenure are compromising agropastoral production systems as they seek to adapt to climatic variability.

A recent United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel study, carried out in 2018, on pastoralism and security found that growing competition between herders and farmers over access to water and pasture is a primary driver of an increase in violent conflicts involving pastoralists in parts of West Africa and the Sahel in recent years.

Another key dimension is gender. Gender is a particularly important factor in relation to climate change; in the Sahel, women are among the most vulnerable to its impacts. For example, drought and erratic rainfall increase the workload of women and girls on family farms. Women are also heavily impacted by outbreaks of conflict on all scales.

Another key dimension to keep in mind while talking about the conflict in the Sahel is youth, and, as we all know, on the African continent and in the Sahel young people represent 60 per cent of the population. Scarcity of resources and food insecurity due to climate change and unemployment are leading young people to be recruited by terrorist groups and to migrate to Europe. All the migration of young people to Europe that we are hearing about is because they do not have access to land, employment or resources, and all of that is due to the climate change that is taking place in the Sahel.

Weaknesses in climate-change response also include inadequate climate financing, poor coordination and slow responses on climate-related interventions, as well as an overfocus on conflict and terrorism at the expense of climate issues.

Here I would like to finish by making a few recommendations as a call to action.

First, stability will be achieved only if foreign and national Governments can move beyond counter-terrorism and divert a greater share of resources towards reconciliation, dialogue and tangibly improving vulnerable people's livelihoods.

Secondly, it is key to strengthen dialogue and cooperation with the G-5 on climate change and facilitate increased resource mobilization. That should be done with the collaboration of grass-roots communities and should be understood as a way to reduce conflict since, as mentioned earlier, competition over resources and environmental degradation are some of the drivers of conflict.

Thirdly, recognizing and recording local land rights, strengthening the capacity for developing effective land-management systems, interventions that improve women's land rights, including legislative reform, enabling herders to access grazing resources through locally negotiated resource-management agreements — all of those are necessary.

Lastly, it is imperative that stabilization efforts take into account intersecting issues related to environmental degradation, demographic factors, changes in livelihoods and weak governance; otherwise, they may aggravate and amplify conflict rather than create pathways to resolution.

The President: I thank Ms. Bandiaky-Badji for her briefing.

I would like to draw the attention of speakers to paragraph 22 of note 507 (S/2017/507), which encourages all participants in Council meetings to deliver their statements in five minutes or less, in line with the Council's commitment to making more effective use of open meetings.

I now give the floor to those Council members wishing to make statements.

Mr. De Rivièrè (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank Ms. Akyaa Pobee, Mr. Tiaré and Ms. Bandiaky-Badji for their briefings.

The situation in the Sahel remains very alarming. Millions of people are suffering from food insecurity. Terrorist groups exact a heavy toll from civilian populations and local forces. Those groups extend their threat as far as eastern Senegal and the northern parts of the Gulf of Guinea countries, such as Togo, which fell victim to a terrorist attack last week. Given that situation, resolute action on the part of the international community is indispensable.

France commends the efforts of the Group of Five for the Sahel (G-5 Sahel) to promote development and security in recent years. We can only deplore the decision of Mali's transitional authorities to leave the

G-5, in which Mali has played a dynamic role since 2014. That withdrawal weakens the regional security architecture. However, we should not reach hasty conclusions about the future of the G-5 Sahel. It is up to the members of that body to decide on that.

Despite those difficulties, the Joint Force of the G-5 Sahel conducted operations during the past six months. In the face of a cross-border terrorist threat, regional cooperation is indispensable, and support for States so that they can continue to conduct cross-border operations is vital. We commend the support provided by partners, particularly the European Union.

The United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) is providing support to the battalions of the G-5 Sahel Joint Force through the tripartite mechanism financed by the European Union. Clearly, Mali's withdrawal from the G-5 Sahel will lead to the suspension of support for Malian battalions, since they no longer participate in the Force's operations.

We regret that the Security Council did not reach an agreement on the creation of a support office for the Joint Force financed by mandatory contributions. This would have avoided the difficulties we are seeing today. We remain convinced that increased support from the Council and Member States for robust African operations is vital. Without it, we risk seeing more African countries turn to harmful solutions, such as the use of mercenaries.

In this regard, I reiterate France's deep concern about the serious allegations of human rights violations by Malian armed forces and Wagner Group mercenaries. It is essential that national and international investigations be conducted — without hindrance and in complete independence — to establish the facts. MINUSMA must be allowed to conduct its own investigations and report the results without further delay. We are surprised that the latest quarterly report from MINUSMA's human rights division has not yet been published. We call on the United Nations to do so as soon as possible.

The Barkhane force continues its withdrawal from Mali. But France intends to continue to support those Sahelian countries that so wish it and to strengthen its support for those in the Gulf of Guinea in the face of the expansion of terrorism from the Sahel. Several consultations have taken place with these countries, which have already expressed specific needs. We are discussing how to respond with our partners,

particularly those in Europe. This could include assistance in training and education, the supply of equipment, or even support for operations against terrorism. The G-5 Sahel and the Accra Initiative could be part of our frames of reference if our partners in the region so wish.

We will put civilians and prevention more at the heart of our strategy. The Sahel Alliance, whose financial commitments amount to €26 billion, is an essential tool, and its activities must continue. The United Nations, through its integrated strategy for the Sahel, must play its full part in this effort.

Ms. Dautllari (Albania): Let me begin by thanking Assistant Secretary-General Pobee, Executive Secretary Tiaré and Ms. Bandiaky-Badji for their updates on the latest developments in the Sahel.

At the outset, we note with regret the withdrawal of Mali from the Group of Five for the Sahel (G-5 Sahel), especially when this decision comes at a time when there is continued need for regional cooperation and multilateral approaches, as no country can resolve the problems alone. We think that it is important to have dialogue among the States of the G-5 Sahel in order for Mali to return to the Group, considering the security gap that Mali's withdrawal creates, not only for countries of the Sahel, but for the entire region. At the same time, it is up to its members to decide how they wish to proceed.

The Sahel continues to experience one of the world's most severe humanitarian and security crises. Albania is extremely concerned about the growing extremist and terrorist threat, particularly the expansion of jihadist groups. In this context, it is important to address the root causes of instability, such as underdevelopment, weak governance and climate change in the Sahel, including through the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel. We regret that the annual summit of the Heads of State was postponed indefinitely and that the Defence and Security Committee has not met. We call on the Committee members to show the political will and commitment needed to address the challenges facing the Sahel.

The volatile political situation in the Sahel, particularly in Mali and Burkina Faso, has negatively affected the effectiveness and capacity of the Joint Force of the G-5 Sahel. We call on Burkina Faso and Mali to establish new transition timetables and restore the constitutional order. We welcome the role

of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in this process.

The reports of human rights violations and abuses in the Sahel are deeply troubling. We acknowledge that the Joint Force operates in an extremely challenging environment. However, all military operations must adhere to human rights and international humanitarian law. In this regard, the deployment of Wagner Group forces in Mali presents a great risk to civilians, and mounting evidence is emerging of exactions during operations. We urge all allegations to be independently and impartially investigated, and violators must be held to account.

We are also deeply concerned at reports of sexual and gender-based violence by Joint Force personnel. We encourage better monitoring of such cases and call on all Member States to hold perpetrators to account and exclude them from further deployment. We urge the Joint Force to comply with its human rights compliance framework and continue to implement its recommendations.

Albania welcomes the efforts taken by the African Union, ECOWAS and the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali to support the Joint Force. We welcome the joint assessment of security in the Sahel that the United Nations, the African Union, ECOWAS and the G-5 Sahel have planned, and the recent announcement by Secretary-General Guterres while visiting the region that the former President of the Niger would lead the joint assessment team. In this regard, I would like to ask how Mali's withdrawal from the G-5 Sahel affects the planned assessment.

In conclusion, the Joint Force remains critical for a collective security response to the crisis facing the Sahel. The international community should continue to assist the Joint Force to strengthen its operational capacity. We call on all members to step up their engagement and cooperation and unify the G-5 Sahel's common objectives of fighting terrorism and creating a more peaceful future for all Sahelians.

Mr. De Almeida Filho (Brazil): I would also like to thank Assistant Secretary-General Pobee and Executive Secretary Tiaré for their informative briefings. We listened carefully to Ms. Bandiaky-Badji.

Recent developments in the Sahel region, as highlighted in the report of the Secretary-General on the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel

(S/2022/382), showcase how lack of progress in the political sphere can hamper efforts to combat violence, which, in turn, makes political solutions to conflict even more elusive.

In order to be perfectly clear, the frustratingly long political transition in Mali has contributed to the lack of political understanding in the Group of Five for the Sahel (G-5 Sahel) as a whole and hampered the activities of its Joint Force. This has become even more obvious since the announcement of the decision by the Malian authorities to withdraw from all structures and bodies of the G-5 Sahel, including the Joint Force. We believe that the G-5 Sahel constitutes an important forum capable of bringing forward, as is so often said, African solutions for African problems, such as the Joint Force.

While we are still waiting for the other members of the G-5 Sahel to react to Bamako's announcement, Brazil encourages all countries in the region to maintain political engagement, including by means of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). There is almost no alternative to regional cooperation in the fight against terrorism and the other challenges that the region faces.

Political uncertainty in the Sahel region means that support from the United Nations, as well as from regional organizations, is of utmost importance. In the light of this, we welcome the efforts by the Secretary-General, in contact with the Chairperson of the African Union Commission and in collaboration with ECOWAS, to address the situation. We take note of the creation of the independent high-level panel on security and development in the Sahel and look forward to its results. While the situation in the region calls for action, it seems that conditions on the ground are not favourable for the creation of a new United Nations Office.

We welcome the fact that, in spite of all these difficulties, the G-5 Sahel has been able to perform operations, even though they remain short of what is necessary to stave off the threat posed by illegal armed groups and terrorist organizations.

We also welcome the support that the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) has been able to provide to the Joint Force, in line with the mandate established by the Council. It is noteworthy that MINUSMA itself faces challenging circumstances at this particular moment.

The humanitarian situation in the Sahel region is of great concern. In that context, we wish to highlight

the importance of the international humanitarian law and human rights compliance framework endorsed and implemented by the G-5 Sahel Joint Force. We urge the Joint Force to pay particular attention to the elements of child protection, in compliance with the framework. There must be a clear procedure for the treatment and transfer of children associated, or allegedly associated, with armed groups to civilian child-protection actors, as well as specialized training for Joint Force personnel.

Brazil shares the Secretary-General's concern over the security situation in the Sahel, in particular in the light of the reports of violence against civilians. The improvement of those conditions depends, as we pointed out, on progress in the political sphere.

Mr. Zhang Jun (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Assistant Secretary-General Pobee and Executive Secretary Tiaré for their briefings. I listened carefully to Ms. Bandiaky-Badji's statement.

The current situation in the Sahel region is complex and severe, beset with numerous security and economic challenges, among others. There were once again terrorist attacks in the Niger, Burkina Faso and Mali recently, causing a large number of casualties, which is distressing. Recently, Secretary-General Guterres made a special trip to West Africa and the Sahel, which highlighted the fact that the Sahel issue remains one of the main concerns and priorities of the United Nations. The international community should respond to the Secretary-General's appeal and increase its attention and support to the region.

First, with regard to strengthening unity and cooperation, the Sahel region faces multiple challenges, such as food security, poverty reduction, development and climate change, and is more severely affected by the coronavirus disease pandemic and geopolitical conflicts. No country can tackle such challenges alone. Countries of the region should strengthen solidarity and cooperation, with the support of the international community, and find joint responses. At present, cooperation in the Sahel region faces new difficulties, and the Group of Five for the Sahel (G-5 Sahel) cooperation mechanism is affected. That is not in the interests of Member States or in the common interests of the region. The most urgent task is to adopt a forward-looking approach and take rational and pragmatic measures, based on fully taking into account each other's situation and balancing the concerns of all parties. It is essential to remove obstacles to regional cooperation, restore long-term momentum for regional

cooperation and inject new impetus into addressing common challenges with solidarity. We hope that Mali, Burkina Faso and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) will continue their consultations and reach an agreement on transitional arrangements as soon as possible. The international community should respect the sovereignty and ownership of regional countries and create a favourable external environment for regional cooperation.

Secondly, on scaling up counter-terrorism efforts, terrorist forces are rampant in the Sahel region, with frequent cross-border activities and the continued expansion and spread to the coastal areas of the Gulf of Guinea. Counter-terrorism is a holistic battle. Only by strengthening every link in the counter-terrorism line of defence can we definitively achieve success. During the reporting period, the Joint Force of the G-5 Sahel continued to carry out operations and achieved some results. It remained an important force in regional counter-terrorism efforts.

Regarding the logistical and financial difficulties faced by the Joint Force, the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali should continue to improve relevant logistical support. Major funders, such as the European Union, should continue to increase financial assistance. The United Nations should also explore more solutions. When countries outside the region adjust their military deployments, they must take the initiative to strengthen communication and coordination with countries of the region to avoid creating a security vacuum. The United Nations is planning a joint strategic assessment with the African Union, ECOWAS and the G-5 Sahel. We hope that the United Nations will strengthen communication with all stakeholders in that process, with a view to strengthening solidarity and cooperation with countries of the region. Based on the existing regional cooperation mechanisms, the assessment should focus on the challenges faced by countries of the region with regard to logistics, funding and capacity-building and put forward realistic solutions.

Thirdly, on adhering to the priority of development, Africa faces arduous tasks in achieving development. The current global food, energy and financial crises have exacerbated the situation in Africa. The situation in the Sahel region is even more severe. At present, more than 10 million people face severe famine, and millions are displaced. That highlights the importance and urgency of tackling the issue of development. The

international community must maintain its attention to, and investment in, the Sahel region.

All United Nations agencies should perform their respective functions and, in line with the actual situation on the ground, vigorously promote the implementation of the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel. It is necessary to scale up investment in food security, poverty eradication, infrastructure, education, health care, vocational skills training and other fields, genuinely devote resources and efforts to areas where the urgent needs of regional countries lie and focus on addressing the root causes.

China will continue to stand with the countries of the Sahel region and speed up implementation of the outcomes of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation and the Global Development Initiative. We will continue to support the region in its economic recovery and sustainable development with practical actions and in achieving sustainable peace in the region.

Mr. Raguttahalli (India): Let me begin by thanking Assistant Secretary-General Martha Pobe, Executive Secretary of the Group of Five for the Sahel (G-5 Sahel) Eric Tiaré and the civil society briefer, Ms. Bandiaky-Badji, for their respective briefings.

As evident from the Secretary-General's report (S/2022/382), terrorist forces are taking advantage of the unstable political and security situation in Sahel region, particularly in Mali and Burkina Faso. The consolidation and expanding footprints of terrorist groups in the Sahel affiliated with Al-Qaida and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and their growing nexus with organized criminal networks have enabled their easy access to arms, equipment, technology and financial resources and have contributed to the expansion of their influence towards the coastal region of the Gulf of Guinea.

We strongly condemn last week's barbaric and cowardly terrorist attack on a military outpost in Togo — a country that has so far remained free of terrorist violence — wherein eight brave soldiers were martyred. That incident is another reminder to the international community that terrorism's contours are not just regional but also global. Defeating it requires a decisive, zero-tolerance approach across all levels — national, regional and international — and jointly by all the stakeholders involved.

Addressing the threat of terrorism is a prerequisite for achieving any meaningful peace in the Sahel region.

At the same time, the regional security initiatives such as the Joint Force of the G-5 Sahel have an important role to play. In recent months, the G-5 Sahel security mechanism has been seriously affected by a lack of political direction and coordination on the ground. Mali's decision to withdraw from all G-5 Sahel organs and entities changes the dynamics of the regional efforts in play. Coupled with the political uncertainty over transition timelines in Mali and Burkina Faso, this development will have an adverse impact the operations of the Joint Force. Operations in the Liptako-Gourma tri-border area shared by Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger, which has been the hotspot for terrorism in the region, have already seen a halt in recent months.

Effective collaboration and trust-building among the G-5 Sahel countries is needed to enable the Joint Force to undertake counter-terrorism operations. We believe it is important for Mali and the Economic Community of West African States to reach an agreement on the political transition and elections. The key to peace in Mali lies in a Mali-owned and Mali-led process and one that is seen as inclusive and representative by the people of Mali. Peace in Mali is a prerequisite for peace in the Sahel.

As the Secretary-General notes in his report, a lack of consensus among partners and donors on the support mechanism for the G-5 Joint Force has proved to be a significant obstacle to its effective functioning. The Force is suffering from capacity constraints such as a lack of training, equipment, air assets, logistical support and so forth. It is important that traditional peacekeeping be complemented by regional operations in order to neutralize terrorist groups and entities. We therefore reiterate our call for sustainable and predictable support to be provided to the Joint Force by its international partners, as well as through United Nations-assessed contributions. The Secretary-General proposed various support options in his previous reports. The Council should overcome its indecisiveness and examine those options seriously.

India has a long history of helping to meet to the defence and security needs of African countries, including in the Sahel region. We remain committed to supporting them by exchanging expertise and providing counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism training to African defence and security forces. The prosperity and well-being of the peoples of the G-5 Sahel are very important to us, and in that pursuit, India remains steadfast in its commitment.

Mr. De La Fuente Ramírez (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Assistant Secretary-General Martha Pobee and Executive Secretary Eric Tiaré for their briefings and Ms. Solange Bandiaky-Badji for her comments on the extremely important topic of conflict and climate change.

The briefings we have just heard demonstrate once again that the problems facing the countries of the Sahel are transnational ones. In a situation marked by increasing violence and expanded activity by extremist groups from central Sahel to the Gulf of Guinea, it is essential for the countries of the region to act in a coordinated manner and on the basis of a shared strategy. Even with its operational limitations, the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel (G-5 Sahel) has been a vital component in the regional architecture for combating terrorism, and it is still a useful platform for containing violence. We therefore regret Mali's decision to withdraw from it, which will restrict the Joint Force's scope of action in some of the areas with the highest concentrations of terrorist activity, particularly along the tri-border area. In that context, I would like to bring up three issues that Mexico considers important.

First, we welcome the strategic assessment on security in the Sahel announced by the Secretary-General during his recent visit to the Niger. We hope that this exercise will make it possible to identify courses of action that respond to the interests of all participants and take advantage of existing institutions such as the G-5 Sahel. The assessment should take into account the evaluations that the Secretariat has made of the Joint Force in the past few years, as well as the views of the members of the Security Council. Mexico believes that without a clear, solid political agreement among the Governments of the region regarding the strategy to be followed, it will be difficult for the Council to make progress in its discussions on how the United Nations can increase its support for combating terrorism in the Sahel, including the financing of the Joint Force.

Secondly, the arrival of new actors in the Sahel, the redeployment of international forces such as Operation Barkhane and Task Force Takuba and the growing tensions within and outside the region have led to a situation in which actors with differing strategies and objectives are multiplying. The United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel and the Special Coordinator for the Development of the Sahel must

use their good offices to lend consistency to regional cooperation in its various aspects, paying particular attention to the socioeconomic causes underlying the conflicts, respect for human rights and international humanitarian law. Based on that logic, we believe that the role of MINUSMA in the changing regional context is fundamental. We therefore reiterate our support for the upcoming renewal of its mandate. It will be particularly important to maintain the support that the Mission provides to the G-5 Sahel Joint Force.

Thirdly, Mexico notes with concern that the deterioration in the regional security situation has occurred alongside the breakdown of constitutional order in three of the G-5 Sahel member countries, and that does not appear to be mere coincidence. We therefore urge the transitional Governments of Mali, Chad and Burkina Faso to restore legal order in cooperation with regional organizations. Only sound governance, legitimately elected leadership and the inclusion of all sectors of society, especially women and young people, can ultimately create the political conditions needed for a stable and prosperous Sahel.

Ms. Evstigneeva (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank Assistant Secretary-General Martha Pobe for her briefing on the evolving situation in the region.

We are also grateful to the representatives of the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel (G-5 Sahel) and civil society.

Unfortunately, the situation in the Sahel is not improving, and in that regard we are in full agreement with the briefers. The terrorist activity in the region continues, along with acute inter-ethnic and intercommunal conflicts, and with a very negative impact on the security situation. Dozens of soldiers and hundreds of civilians are dying at the hands of militants. A new and very worrisome destabilizing element is the growth of tensions among the countries of the regions themselves, tensions that are largely a result of external interference.

The members of the Council are well aware that since the initiative behind the Joint Force of the G-5 Sahel was first put forward by the countries of the region themselves — which is an important fact — Russia has consistently supported its formation and deployment. The fact is that the fight against terrorism knows no borders or nationalities and is a shared priority for all. We also advocated expanding United Nations assistance

to the Joint Force, which would help to strengthen regional solidarity. We have to point out with regret that due to Western pressure, primarily from France, the G-5 Sahel has found itself dealing with challenges that are far removed from the much more urgent issue of combating terrorism. On far-fetched pretexts, Mali was denied presidency of the Group, and a Joint Force summit planned for February, where Bamako was supposed to take lead of the Force, was never held. In that regard, the decision of the Malian authorities to withdraw from the G-5 Sahel, provoked by the confrontational behaviour of its neighbours, appears entirely logical.

Besides that, we should not forget that harsh Western economic sanctions, and restrictions from the Economic Community of West African States, have been imposed on Mali, and the withdrawal from Malian territory of France's Operation Barkhane and the Task Force Takuba is continuing. All of that is going on at a time when it is extremely difficult for Mali to deal with major challenges, and first and foremost the threat of terrorism. It seems clear that it was assumed that Mali's army would not be able to achieve its military objectives, but as we know, that did not happen. Thanks to its own efforts and those of more effective partners, there have been visible successes whereby a number of settlements have been unblocked and the country's northern and eastern regions are being steadily liberated. Rather than creating obstacles, in the current situation what should be done is to provide the Malian authorities with effective assistance while encouraging them to pursue a balanced course in resolving the crisis in the country, including where restoring constitutional order is concerned. In that regard, we call on the members of the G-5 Sahel to adopt a constructive approach and take the necessary measures to put themselves on an independent path to unity without dictates from outside. We hope that by following the principle of African solutions to African problems, the States of the Sahel, including Mali, will be able to agree on the future activities of their Joint Force, and that the ongoing difficulties will not diminish their efforts to combat terrorism.

Russia will continue its constructive participation, including as a permanent member of the Security Council, in the collective efforts to achieve peace and stability in the Sahara-Sahel region, while providing support to African countries on a bilateral basis in order to increase the operational effectiveness of their armed forces by training military and law-enforcement

personnel and providing humanitarian assistance, including in education and health care. The higher-education institutions of Russia's Ministry of Defence are currently providing instruction to military personnel from Mali, the Niger, Burkina Faso and Chad, and our Ministry of Internal Affairs is training Malian police.

I would also like to underscore that our bilateral military and technical assistance to Mali and other African States is aimed at supporting national authorities in their very complex task of combating terrorism and strengthening national security, which is essential if their citizens are to feel safe and secure and able to engage in their countries' development efforts. Here in the Security Council, Western countries are once again making claims about certain mercenaries. I would like to point out, however, that mercenaries from the West, including from countries represented on the Council, have participated in numerous coups on the African continent since the collapse of colonialism, as well as in propping up apartheid and looting natural resources, including with the aim of supporting the interests of their big businesses.

Another telling statistic is the list of official military interventions by the West in Africa — several dozen, even according to the most conservative estimates. And there are dozens more that have never been acknowledged. Regrettably, neocolonialism is now being leveraged to pit countries of the region against one another in order to weaken them. That should not be happening in the twenty-first century. Africa is capable of determining its own future. We call on Mali's neighbours to once again reconsider their own sovereign role in addressing the issues of their continent versus those with a hidden agenda with regard to Africa.

Dame Barbara Woodward (United Kingdom): I would like to thank our briefers.

I would like to make three points. First, the peoples of the Sahel can continue to count on the United Kingdom's steadfast support. The challenges facing the region are complex, interlinked and require holistic solutions. We are working with our partners in the Sahel to foster long-term stability by addressing the drivers of conflict, including climate change. We are also working to protect the most vulnerable in the Sahel from the impact of the global food crisis caused by Russia's illegal and unjustified aggression against Ukraine. In addition to agreeing on unprecedented World Bank financing to protect vulnerable countries

from the economic impact of Russia's invasion, the United Kingdom's previous funding of \$200 million, plus our new humanitarian funding, will help more than 3 million people in the region with food assistance.

Secondly, I would like to emphasize the importance of ensuring that all actors in the Sahel promote and protect human rights and comply with international human rights law and humanitarian law. In that respect, we remain seriously concerned about the presence of the Wagner Group in Mali. Allegations of human rights violations and abuses have increased significantly since the Wagner Group deployed to Mali in December 2021. The Wagner Group also has a track record of exploiting natural resources and spreading destabilizing disinformation. We urge the Malian authorities to end their relationship with the Wagner Group in the interests of national and regional stability. They should also allow the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) unfettered access to Moura to conduct a transparent and independent investigation into allegations that Malian troops, operating alongside Wagner Group mercenaries, massacred civilians in March.

Thirdly, lasting peace and stability in the Sahel will depend on good governance, built around the rule of law, accountable and effective State institutions and the development of sustainable livelihoods. We therefore support the efforts of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to encourage timely transitions back to constitutional order in Mali and Burkina Faso, and we encourage the transitional authorities in both countries to continue to engage constructively with ECOWAS on timetables for political transition and practical steps to prepare for elections.

In conclusion, the United Kingdom is proud to be supporting efforts to stabilize the Sahel, including through our deployment in MINUSMA and our humanitarian and development partnerships. We remain committed to helping to address the Sahel's challenges through a holistic approach incorporating security, governance and development.

Ms. Moran (Ireland): First, let me acknowledge our briefers this morning. I would like to thank Assistant Secretary-General Pobee and Mr. Tiaré for their invaluable insights. I also want to thank Ms. Bandiaky-Badji for her excellent briefing on climate change as a driver of conflict in the Sahel. Her call to action really reminds us of the link between climate and security, and I thank her for that.

When we last convened on the matter of the Group of Five for the Sahel (G-5 Sahel) (see S/PV.8903), the main thrust of our discussion was on support options for the Joint Force itself. Now the people of the Sahel are grappling with a situation that is deteriorating at a rate that defies belief. We share the Secretary-General's concerns, following his visit to the region, about the "multi-dimensional crisis of an extraordinary scale" that is facing the region.

The scale is underscored by the facts — the region accounted for 35 per cent of global terrorism deaths in 2021; food insecurity is on the rise; and human rights continue to be violated and abused. Ireland offers its sincere condolences to the Governments and the peoples of the region on the tragic loss of life over recent months

We regret the decision by the Malian transitional authorities to withdraw from the G-5 Sahel, including the Joint Force. The challenges facing the region are so immense and transnational in nature that they cannot be met by any country acting in isolation, but only on the basis of meaningful joint action and regional cooperation.

Long-term security and prosperity in the Sahel can be achieved only through effective, accountable and inclusive systems of democratic governance. We continue to urge transitional authorities in the region to work with the United Nations, the Economic Community of West African States and the African Union to ensure timely and peaceful transitions to democratically elected Governments.

In November, Ireland acknowledged the progress the Joint Force was making, particularly in terms of integrating respect for human rights and international humanitarian law within its structures and operations. It is not possible — as the Assistant Secretary-General said this morning — to effectively terrorism if these fundamental principles are ignored. We agree with the Secretary-General when he says that G-5-Sahel authorities should unreservedly commit to efforts to uphold and protect human rights. We simply cannot compromise on basic accountability and standards.

We know that military solutions alone will not suffice. No matter the level of political will, the resources allocated and the supports the G-5 Sahel Joint Force might receive, it is increasingly obvious that it cannot defeat the scourge of violence when the drivers of violence remain so prevalent and unchecked.

While democratic values and institutions continue to be threatened, while human rights violations are dismissed, while displacement and food insecurity are allowed to become routine, while sexual and gender-based violence and attacks on civil society remain prevalent and lack of opportunity forms part of the fabric of everyday life, the cycle of violence will remain unbroken. This must be the lesson of the past number of months — more sustainable, inclusive and holistic solutions, such as preventive action to tackle root causes of instability, including the impact of climate change, are needed to address the challenges of the region.

We continue to believe that regionally led initiatives devised by the countries of the region, and supported by predictable and sustainable funding, are key to addressing long-term peace and stability in the Sahel. We firmly believe that no international initiative will produce results in addressing insecurity in the Sahel without the commitment, cooperation and determination of the countries of the region. We are pleased that former President Mahamadou Issoufou has agreed to chair a joint strategic assessment of security and development challenges in the Sahel. We look forward to the outcomes of that independent assessment.

Let me conclude by underscoring Ireland's commitment to working closely and collaboratively on the Council and across the United Nations to counter the threat of terrorism in the Sahel and, importantly, to address the factors that are fuelling that scourge.

Ms. Juul (Norway): I also wish to thank the briefers for their very valuable insights.

As the Security Council saw during our trip to the Sahel in October, the region still needs our support. We were therefore encouraged by the Secretary-General's recent visit to West Africa. His visit highlighted alarming situations in the political, humanitarian and human rights spheres. In order to turn negative political trends in more constructive directions, agreed timelines and calendars for return to constitutional order will be necessary.

We support the efforts of the African Union (AU) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to support Mali, Burkina Faso, Guinea-Conakry and Chad's returns to constitutional order. Nevertheless, while governance crises continue — hampering Governments from fulfilling their responsibilities — we cannot delay our humanitarian responses to people in need.

In many countries, food prices and the number of food-insecure people are increasing drastically. Such needs must be addressed urgently. In the light of this deteriorated situation, Norway has allocated approximately \$25 million to humanitarian efforts in the Sahel and the Lake Chad region in 2022. We continue to support policies and development programmes to ensure long-term access to food, water and sanitation, health services, education and livelihoods. And, as Ms. Solange Bandiaky-Badji explained, climate-smart solutions will also increasingly be necessary.

Reports of increasing human rights violations and abuses in Mali and other countries must be followed by full access for independent investigations. We echo the Secretary-General's call for the authorities of the Group of Five for the Sahel (G-5 Sahel) to uphold and protect human rights. That is important for the success of efforts to combat terrorism, improve security and gain the trust of communities. Particular attention must be given to the situation of children. Norway also remains concerned about recent worrisome reports, which include allegations of human rights violations and abuses committed by the Wagner Group. Accountability must be ensured.

Turning now to solutions, we welcome the news of a joint strategic assessment for the Sahel. In the light of the regrettable Malian decision to withdraw from all the organs and bodies of the G-5 Sahel, this initiative makes up a particularly timely attempt to find common solutions on security, governance and development issues for the region. We look forward to former President Issoufou's lead on that issue, in cooperation with the United Nations, the AU, ECOWAS and the G-5 Sahel — building on the experience of its Joint Force. New thinking around security for West Africa and the Sahel should have a holistic approach and ensure ownership by countries of the region.

The engagement of coastal States is also positive. Discussions cannot shy away from tougher issues, like financing and mandates for robust, regionally led, operations. That must also be matched by human rights due diligence and frameworks that are compliant with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. We underline that the assessment must lead to conclusions that are bold enough to make a real difference, while also remaining implementable.

In conclusion, this is what we believe should happen now. First, we should consolidate and uphold the strong mandate of the United Nations Multidimensional

Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali as a key stabilizer for Mali and the wider region. In parallel, we should use the upcoming joint strategic assessment as an opportunity to have a serious discussion on innovative future solutions. Norway stands ready to support such discussions.

Mr. Agyeman (Ghana): I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the three African members of the Security Council (A3), namely, Kenya, Gabon and my own country, Ghana.

We welcome the report of the Secretary-General (S/2022/382) and thank Assistant Secretary-General Martha Pobee and Executive Secretary Eric Tiaré for their comprehensive briefings and insightful perspectives on the situation in the Sahel. We also welcome the participation in this meeting of Ms. Solange Bandiaky-Badji, who spoke on behalf of the Rights and Resources Initiative.

The G-5 Sahel Joint Force is indeed a critical component of the regional-led initiatives in dealing with the security situation in the Sahel. The A3 notes with concern that despite its importance, the Force has not been able to effectively deal with the volatile security situation in the Sahel, which has been characterized by increasing attacks by violent extremist groups. We note that factors such as logistical and funding challenges have negatively impacted the operational effectiveness of the Force.

The A3 therefore regrets the announcement by the Malian transitional authorities of the country's withdrawal from the G-5 Sahel Force. As we all already know, Mali is at the centre of the crisis in the region and a required partner in addressing that transnational crisis. The complex nature of the security situation in that country and in the region require regional and multilateral efforts, as no one country can tackle it alone. The decision by the Malian authorities to further isolate themselves from the region and the international community is therefore deeply regrettable.

We urge the member countries of the G-5 Sahel Joint Force to quickly resolve the concerns over coordination within the Joint Force by dealing with the political and leadership crisis among the members. We also hope that the delayed meeting of the Defence Ministers of the G-5 Sahel Joint Force, which should have taken place in November 2021, and the annual Heads of State summit held in February of every year will take place as soon as possible and without further undue delay

and in recognition of the new developments within the contributing countries of the Joint Force.

Notwithstanding those challenges, the A3 welcomes the recent visit by the Secretary-General to the region to engage the relevant actors and assess the situation on the ground. We further commend the overall efforts of the international community in addressing the security challenges in the Sahel, including support for the Joint Force.

While commending the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) for its support to the G-5 Sahel Force, we acknowledge that MINUSMA itself is constrained in its mandate. We look forward to the renewal of the MINUSMA mandate in June with elements that would enhance its logistical capabilities and effectiveness in dealing with the security challenges.

In the light of the complex political situation in the Sahel, as well as the additional security risks posed to the Force following the withdrawal of Mali, and mindful of the need for urgent action in support of strengthening the G-5 Sahel Joint Force, the A3 would like to highlight the following.

As indicated a few moments ago, the security situation in Mali cannot be addressed by the Malians alone and will require support from the region and international community. We therefore call on the Malian authorities and the other States members of the Force to re-engage in dialogue for a speedy resolution of the challenges noted.

Secondly, addressing the political uncertainties in the Sahel remains critical to a sustainable resolution of the challenges. In that regard, getting the countries in the region under military regimes, including Mali, to adhere to the transitional timeline endorsed by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) for the swift return to constitutional rule remains the best way forward. We therefore continue to encourage the ongoing dialogue between the host authorities and ECOWAS.

The withdrawal of Mali from the Force, now more than ever, requires the Council and other partners to speak with one voice on the appropriate support mechanisms for other regional-led initiatives to fill the security gaps while also finding the much-needed appropriate support mechanism to strengthen the Force. Initiatives such as the Nouakchott process on the enhancement of security cooperation and the

operationalization of the African Peace and Security Architecture in the Sahelo-Saharan region of 2013, the Accra initiative of 2017 and the communiqué of the Extraordinary Summit of the Heads of State and Government of ECOWAS of 2019, which is aimed at mobilizing an ECOWAS standby force in addressing the threats in the region, need the required support.

We therefore welcome the United Nations-African Union conference held in New York in December 2021, which decided to establish a joint strategic assessment with a view to seeking ways to strengthen support for the G-5 Sahel, its Joint Force and other security, development and governance initiatives. The appointment of Mr. Mahamadou Issoufou, former President of the Niger, to chair the joint strategic assessment is a welcome development. We call for the speedy commencement of the work of joint strategic assessment and express optimism that the joint assessment will outline a practical approach in dealing with the economic, governance and security challenges, including the activities of terrorists and insurgents.

The A3 remains hopeful that the G-5 Sahel Joint Force could yet prove to be a useful body for countering the terrorist threats in the region. In that regard, capacity-building support to address the challenges of information flow, as well as continuous training that gives them confidence to respond to the changing situation and enhances their operational effectiveness, is recommended. Additionally, support from the international community in ensuring that the Force is embedded with mentors and trainers that have counter-terrorism experience is critical.

While welcoming bilateral support from partners of the G-5 Sahel Joint Force, we also believe that the Force would benefit from predictable funding from United Nations assessed contributions, as proposed by the Secretary-General to ensure efficiency. The proposal for a United Nations support office for the Force is therefore worth considering.

Indeed, the withdrawal and reconfiguration of the French troops, including Operations Barkhane and Takuba, which form part of its Sahel-wide counter-terrorism force, as well as the withdrawal of Chadian troops, requires of the Council a careful appraisal of the present dynamics. Assessing the security gap created and a recommitment of member States to increasing troop contribution to the Force, together with support from the international community, is therefore necessary.

We condemn the attacks by the terrorist and violent extremist groups, which have led to the loss of many lives, including those of military personnel. The surge in such terrorist attacks continues to exacerbate the security situation in the region and requires urgent attention. The potential spillover effect of the crisis in Libya, including the return of foreign terrorist fighters, and the influx of small arms from that country into the Sahel region also require critical attention. We reiterate the call by the African Union for the strengthening of the capacity and cohesion of the G-5 Sahel Force and the Multinational Joint Task Force in order to eliminate foreign fighters, mercenaries and terrorist groups in the Sahel region and prevent their possible spread to other parts of the continent.

The deteriorating human rights situation in the Sahel, including violations against civilians both by terrorist armed groups and, reportedly, by armed and security forces in the region is worrying. While encouraging the swift investigation and prosecution of perpetrators by the host authorities, we also welcome support for the G-5 Sahel Joint Force in enhancing its compliance and accountability vis-à-vis international humanitarian law and international human rights law as well as conduct and discipline standards.

The impact of climate change on security, as well as the coronavirus disease pandemic, continue to exacerbate the humanitarian situation, as evidenced in the increasing flow of displaced persons and refugees in the region. We therefore endorse the Secretary-General's call for donors to respond more generously to the humanitarian appeal for the region.

Lastly, there is also a need to pay critical attention to addressing the root causes of terrorism, particularly by supporting programmes for strengthening governance and development institutions.

Given the increasing peace and security challenges in the Sahel, the A3 underscores that peacebuilding efforts, now more than ever, need to be prioritized and reinforced for the Sahelian countries.

In conclusion, the A3 believes that continuous support for regional-led and complementary initiatives aimed at tackling the security situation, including through bilateral and multilateral support for the G-5 Sahel Force, remains one of the most effective ways to counter the security challenges facing the region.

Mrs. Nusseibeh (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I thank the Assistant Secretary-

General for Africa in the Departments of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and Peace Operations, Ms. Martha Ama Akyaa Pobee, for her comprehensive briefing and tireless efforts, and Ms. Solange Bandiaky-Badji for highlighting the serious security challenges that the Sahel region is facing owing to climate change. We also thank Mr. Eric Tiaré for his briefing in his capacity as Executive Secretary of the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel (G-5 Sahel).

The United Arab Emirates appreciates the efforts of the Secretary-General in supporting peace and security in West Africa and the Sahel, including his recent visit to the region and his important message, when he said,

“Establishing peace, stability and prosperity across the Sahel remains an absolute priority for the United Nations”.

It is important that we all stress this issue, especially considering the difficult and complex security, political and humanitarian challenges that the region faces. In this regard, we need to strengthen joint action and improve coordination and cooperation at the regional and international levels to face these challenges, including through the collective efforts of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), the Group of Five for the Sahel (G-5 Sahel), the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and the African Union.

In the light of the developments in the region, I would like to emphasize three points. First, political instability is undermining the capability of the region to respond effectively to current challenges. These challenges require comprehensive political dialogue at the domestic and regional levels to achieve necessary reforms and strengthen the capacities of political institutions in the Sahel region, especially in Mali. The international community must prioritize the needs, aspirations and security of the people of the region, while ensuring that these efforts include the voices of local communities, especially women and youth, given their vital role in building peaceful and prosperous societies. We appreciate in this regard the important function that MINUSMA plays in supporting the achievement of these goals, and we look forward to renewing its mandate soon so that it can continue this important role in the region.

Secondly, the response to the deteriorating security situation in the Sahel region requires constructive

participation from all stakeholders, foremost of which is the Joint Force of the G-5 Sahel and its partners. This enables Governments to address cross-border challenges, which can have an outsized impact on initiatives and institutions that seek to maintain regional peace and security. We must continue to combat terrorism and transnational crime in the region with a comprehensive approach that accounts for the specific context in each country, including the increase in terrorist activity well as various ongoing internal crises. We express our deep concern about the multiple terrorist attacks targeting civilians and United Nations personnel. The perpetrators of these attacks must be held accountable.

Thirdly, the complexity of crises in the Sahel requires the international community to respond in a coordinated, urgent and comprehensive manner. We appreciate the initiative of the Secretary-General, ECOWAS and the G-5 Sahel States to launch a joint strategic assessment to enhance support for the Sahel. The United Arab Emirates looks forward to seeing the results of these efforts, as well as the results of the independent high-level panel on security and development in the Sahel. We must also continue to support sustainable development efforts in the region and enhance the resilience of its societies, including by providing economic opportunities, empowering women and providing basic services to the population.

Finally, and in the context of current geopolitical crises and tensions that have created global food insecurity and other spillover effects, we would like to stress the need for the Security Council to prevent these issues from undermining our ability to work together to address other issues on our agenda, including the Sahel.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of the United States.

Like other Security Council members, the United States is alarmed by rising violent extremism, terrorist attacks, intercommunal violence, growing food insecurity and democratic backsliding in the Sahel. Let us not sugar-coat it: the challenges are acute. Civilian deaths continue to mount, as do the numbers of internally displaced persons and refugees.

As Ms. Bandiaky-Badji noted, there is no one singular issue, but rather a mosaic of interrelated challenges, including political and economic exclusion, resource competition and long-standing grievances. The impacts of climate change, population growth,

displacement and food insecurity complicate the region's response. Further, three of the five Sahelian Governments — Burkina Faso, Chad and Mali — are currently neither democratically elected nor civilian-led, and timelines to return to constitutional order via free and fair elections remain at best unclear.

The United States supports the Secretary-General's call for the authorities in these countries to hand power back to civilian rule as soon as possible. But as much as we need to be clear-eyed about the challenges ahead, we must not sink into cynicism. We must, as others have said, stay engaged and work together to bring stability and security to the people of the Sahel. That is why the United States has continued its strong bilateral partnership with the Group of Five for the Sahel (G-5 Sahel) to address security threats. We have provided more than \$600 million since 2017 — in equipment, training and advisory support for crucial capacity gaps, and we have sent nearly \$2 billion for development projects and nearly \$2.2 billion in humanitarian aid.

But, of course, the real work needs to come from the Sahelian Governments. They hold the keys. They must enact good governance and sustainable development solutions to help turn the tide. That means improving equitable service delivery, expanding widespread access to justice, and holding free and fair elections. That is how to rebuild people's trust in government.

In Mali, we welcomed the strong action of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in defence of democracy in January. We call for the Malian transition authorities to make good on their pledge to the country's people and organize elections according to a reasonable timeline, as it committed to do following the August 2020 coup d'état.

We join others in expressing our regret that Mali has withdrawn from the G-5 Sahel. This is a decision that further isolates Mali from the important work of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali and from the region.

As for Burkina Faso, we also urge the transition Government to come to an agreement with ECOWAS on a timeline to return to democratically elected civilian-led Government. The transition Government must abide by its international commitments, and its obligations to protect civil liberties, freedom of expression, freedom of the press, freedom of peaceful assembly and access to the Internet must be upheld.

In Chad, we support the Chadian people, the African Union and our international partners in advocating a timely transition to a democratically elected civilian-led Government, and we encourage the Transitional Military Council to hold an inclusive national dialogue as soon as possible, followed by a constitutional referendum and then free and fair elections.

And I would be remiss if I did not mention, as others have, the newest variable in regional instability: the Russia-backed Wagner Group. Across Africa, its forces are actively undermining stability, rule of law, good governance and respect for human rights. According to numerous reports, the Wagner Group has committed egregious human rights abuses, often targeting marginalized groups and exploiting long-standing grievances that fuel violent extremist recruitment.

Let us make no mistake: the Wagner Group threatens the safety and the security of United Nations peacekeepers in Mali and the Central African Republic, and it prevents the Missions in those countries from protecting civilians. Russia's disinformation and propaganda efforts continue to deploy false narratives to help protect the Wagner Group from responsibility for its actions, even as we all know and agree that any attack on United Nations personnel may constitute war crimes.

Finally, I want to make it clear that the region cannot move forward until justice and accountability are prioritized. The G-5 Sahel countries must pursue legitimate efforts to prevent, investigate and pursue accountability for allegations of human rights violations and abuses. None of that work is easy, but all of it is vital to the peace and security of the people of the Sahel region. We must therefore keep at it, and we must work together.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

The representative of the Russian Federation has asked for the floor to make a further statement.

Ms. Evstigneeva (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): I thank you, Mr. President, for giving me the floor. Regarding the statement of the representative of the United States of America, I believe that I have already provided a comprehensive response in my main statement.

I now wish to comment on the statement of the Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom, who said that the increase in food prices in Africa and the possible negative impact on food security are an issue. Prices are increasing, and there are many reasons for that, which came about long before the Ukrainian crisis. But, of course, at this stage the situation is made particularly acute by the sanctions that were collectively introduced by the West, primarily under pressure from the United States. Western States are doing everything possible to block shipments of food from Russia, including shipments of grain and fertilizer, to disrupt logistical and financial chains and prevent us from supplying food to countries where hunger could arise.

I believe that saying that we are creating obstacles for food shipments is complete and unprecedented hypocrisy. First of all, millions of tons of grain are being shipped out of Ukraine by land and through ports in Romania. But where is that grain going? Will it ultimately reach Africa and other regions that are experiencing shortages? I have significant doubts as to that, since we see how the situation is playing out — for example, with regard to refugees — and how attention is waning on the part of the international community — the Western community — when it comes to conflicts in Africa and other regions, because Europe and the West and its problems are the top priority.

We hope that all these arguments will be taken into account and that countries, including in Africa, will not be misled regarding the selfless help being provided to them, as we heard in the statements of some of our colleagues. All that is not for free — and is not at all selfless.

The meeting rose at 11.55 a.m.