



United Nations Security Council Arria-formula Meeting on: Combating the Rise of Terrorism and Violent Extremism in West Africa and the Sahel

Objectives

The Security Council through the Statement by the President of the Council (S/PRST/2024/3) has acknowledged “*the challenging security situation in West Africa and the Sahel, including ... the spread of terrorism and violent extremism conducive to terrorism*”.

The Arria Formula meeting therefore presents an opportunity to spotlight the recent rise in terrorism and violent extremism in the Sahel. In addition, the meeting will explore the need to focus on and address the root causes of this worrying trend. The intention is for insights and experiences to be shared in countering terrorist groups and organised crime, particularly where there are significant gaps in security and institutional framework. Additionally, action needs to be taken to address issues that fuel recruitment into terrorist groups and also to tackle propaganda, disinformation and misinformation.

It is hoped that discussion will touch on the specific role of regional bodies including non-security specialized entities. Member States are also expected to share views and proposals on forward looking strategies for the implementation and acceleration of democratic good governance practices including the full, equal, meaningful and safe participation of women and youth in governance and peace building.

The conversation will also give an opportunity to Member States to discuss the nexus between climate change and security in the region.

Background

Whilst the security and political landscape of West Africa and the Sahel continue to experience cascading and unpredictable changes, the underlying context, root causes and challenges faced by countries in the region remain largely unchanged and unaddressed. The rise of violent extremism following the power vacuum that existed in the aftermath of the Libyan conflict in 2011, has resulted in the proliferation of weapons and fighters across the Sahel region and into West Africa. These fighters have formed themselves into terror groups and continue to entrench themselves exploiting existing grievances, such as political instability, marginalization of certain groups including women and youth, and economic challenges in the region.

This development has had a crippling effect on economic growth and development plans, weakened state institutions, which has led to worsening economic hardship resulting in widespread poverty and food insecurity. Furthermore, the compounding negative effects of climate change have left countries in the West Africa and Sahel region remain vulnerable to the spread of terrorism and violent extremism conducive to terrorism.

This has led to the escalation and protraction of ongoing conflicts, emboldened operations of terrorist and transnational organized criminal networks, weakened public trust, and resulted in widespread forcible displacement of people within the region and beyond and worsening humanitarian situations with increasing violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law including conflict related sexual violence.

The report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) for the period from 30 June to 31 December 2023 describe the overall security situation as marked by persistent attacks on military and civilian targets, notably by the *Al-Qaida affiliate Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin* and the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara operating in the Liptako-Gourma region. The combined adverse effects of climate change, ecological changes and natural disasters on one hand and insecurity on the other has also resulted in 7 million people forcibly displaced in the West Africa and Sahel region.

Although some countries have not been faced with incidents of violent extremism, coastal states are not obviated from threats to peace and security within the region. Benin, Ivory Coast and Togo have already suffered attacks and incursions across their borders.

Notable developments in the security architecture in the region raises uncertainty about the future of security and stability of the region, including the drawdown and withdrawal of United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) pursuant to Security Council Resolution 2690, the announcement of withdrawal of Burkina Faso and Niger from the Group of Five for the Sahel (G5 Sahel), following Mali's previous withdrawal, leading to dissolution of G5 Sahel. Furthermore, the announced withdrawal of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger from ECOWAS will have significant implications for the fight against terrorism in the Central Sahel region.

There is the expectation that there should be greater cooperation between regional bodies and entities including ECOWAS, UNOWAS, UNOCA, and ECCAS to address the scourge of terrorism effectively in the West Africa and Sahel region. The Communique of 24th February 2024, by the Extraordinary Summit of the ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State and Government in Abuja, expresses these aspirations including on the operationalisation and full implementation of security and counter-terrorism initiatives including the Accra Initiative and the Multinational Joint Task Force. Consideration must also be given to key initiatives such as the UN Integrated Strategy for the Sahel (UNISS) and the United Nations Support Plan for the Sahel (UNSPS).

It will also be prudent to exert significant efforts to encourage a timely return to civilian led democratic governments, while at the same time fostering policy and institutional reform which incorporates conflict prevention and inclusive peace building initiatives in order to forestall the rise in terrorism and violent extremism in the Sahel.

Guiding Questions

1. What is the assessment of the current state of terrorism and violent extremism in West Africa and the Sahel and the counterterrorism efforts? What are the root causes including but not limited to historical, socio-political, and economic factors contributing to the rise of terrorism and violent extremism in the region?

2. While taking note of the risk of a spillover of terrorism and violent extremism into the coastal states, what are the short- and long-term preventive strategies to be employed to tackle this security threat especially in terms of terrorist recruitment?
3. How have international, regional and national entities responded to these threats so far? What are the key challenges and gaps, including resources gap in the current efforts to combat terrorism and violent extremism in the region? What are the key strategies, resources mobilization and activities, including through Global, Regional and National efforts that can adequately address the rise of terrorism and violent extremism in the region?

Date and Venue

The Arria-formular meeting will be held on **19th June 2024, at 3:00pm at the UNHQ, Conference Room** to be confirmed.

The meeting follows the adoption of the presidential statement on peace consolidation in West Africa by the Security Council and will precede the report of the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General for West Africa and the Sahel, which is due at the end of June 2024.

Participation

The meeting will be open to all Member States, in particular UN Security Council members, member States from the West African and the Sahel region are invited to participate. Participants are requested to limit interventions to three (3) minutes. Subject to availability, interpretation will be provided in the UN official languages.

To inscribe to the list of speakers, please send email to sierraleone@pmun.net , copying slmissionun@yahoo.com no later than 17:00 18 June 2024 with the subject like **“Terrorism and Violent Extremism in West Africa and the Sahel meeting”**.

Briefers:

1. Ms. Natalia Gherman, Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate.
2. Mr. Leonardo Santos Simão, Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General for West Africa and the Sahel.
3. Ms. Martha Ama Akyaa Pobee, Assistant Secretary-General for Africa Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs - Department of Peace Operations.
4. Ambassador Abdel-Fatau Musah, ECOWAS Commissioner for Political Affairs Peace and Security.
5. Dr. Richard Apau, Senior Analyst, African Union Counter Terrorism Centre.