**Security Council**

Briefing on the SG report on the implementation of the UN's integrated strategy for the Sahel

25 November 2015

STATEMENT

Mr. President,

We welcome Ms. Hiroute Guebré Sellasie, Special Representative of the Secretary General for the Sahel Region. We thank her for briefing this Council on the implementation of the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel.

We commend the work being undertaken by the United Nations Office in the Sahel in the prevention of conflicts, good offices and in assisting the countries of the region who face very complex and difficult circumstances.

As mentioned in the Secretary General’s report, the political, security, and humanitarian situation, aggravated by recurrent conflicts, unpredictable climate, epidemics, drug trafficking, transnational organized crime, and the activities of armed and terrorist groups gravely affect the lives of millions of people across the Sahel, with chronic levels of food insecurity and malnutrition, requiring dedicated attention by the international community.

A positive development is the commitment by the Sahel countries to find common solutions to the grave problems affecting them, since the prevailing situation is a threat for the entire region and beyond.

This has driven the Sahel community to a sense of ownership in their common endeavor, which constitutes the right approach to tackle the challenges they face.

The United Nations, and the Security Council in particular, should join forces with the international community in addressing the challenges facing the Sahel countries, afford the necessary political support and material resources to a region with a group of countries in conditions of extreme poverty.

We shall now highlight the political, security and humanitarian situation in the Region and the implementation of the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel.

Mr. President,

Several countries of the region, have either held or are in the process of holding elections, a process that should lead to the consolidation of democratic institutions, and be supported by the international community, through the provision of electoral assistance, enabling those countries to organize free, transparent and peaceful elections.

However, we must recognize that the political parties in these countries do not always play a constructive role, while outside actors try to gain advantage from instability and institutional weakness. Additionally, the always present possibility of rejection of the electoral results, by the losing parties, create negative perceptions and insecurity over the post-electoral period.

Burkina Faso is now facing an important hurdle, with elections to take place soon. The political actors and people are called to assume their responsibilities in the holding of free and transparent elections, marking the end of the transition period and the establishment of effective democratic institutions.

Conflicts and criminal activities weaken the social fabric of the countries in the region and make it impractical to implement programs on good governance, or development, and have impeded the adoption of laws on administrative decentralization.

Mr. President,

The Sahel region faces huge security challenges, mainly due to the insecurity prevailing in Mali and Libya, and by the free movement of armed and terrorist groups.

Transnational organized crime, drug and human trafficking and the activities of Al Qaeda in the Sahel, of ISIS, Boko Haram and other terrorist groups continue to affect the lives of the peoples in the region.

In Mali, despite the signing of the peace agreement, armed groups, terrorists and extremists continue destabilizing the North of the country, by indiscriminately attacking civilians, the Malian armed forces and MINUSMA personnel.

The recent terrorist attack in Bamako is an evidence of how peace in Mali is still a long way ahead.

In Libya, the presence of two parallel contending Governments and their inability to fight ISIS and other terrorist organizations fuels insecurity and instability in the Sahel.

It would be crucial that the parties in Libya conclude the political process, by empowering a national government, as a means of stepping up the fight against terrorism.

The International Community and the United Nations in particular, should continue assisting the Sahel countries. The decision by the G5 Sahel countries to create a Multinational Task Force to combat terrorism and transnational crime deserves the international community's support, especially financial and logistical assistance, to enable them to continue addressing the threat posed by terrorists, drug and human trafficking and mass migration of people from Sub-Saharan Africa to the North and to Europe.

Another case of a successful sub-regional initiative was the creation of the Multinational Task Force (MNJTF) by the Lake Chad Basin States and Benin, who joined forces to fight Boko Haram in the North of Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad and Niger. The success of the Task Force operations led to the recovery of areas previously under the control of Boko Haram, and the release of thousands of people.

Besides conflict-related violence, the Secretary General’s report underlines how the Sahel is affected by food insecurity, malnutrition, epidemics and natural disasters. We are deeply concerned with the fate of millions of people living under such dire conditions.

Mr. President,

The launching in Niamey of the “Sahel Women Empowerment and Demographic Dividend Project”, under the high patronage of the Prime Minister of Niger, as a partnership between the United Nations and the World Bank is a positive case of Women's participation in conflict prevention and resolution.

The project aims at creating economic opportunities for women, girls and their families, and is a demonstration of commitment by the leaders of the Sahel region to empower women for their contribution for regional development.

We commend the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary General in the Sahel for promoting the participation of Women in the implementation of the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Development of the Sahel.

We further call on the UN agencies, international organizations, donors and partners, the African Union, ECOWAS and the European Union to contribute to the implementation of projects, in various countries of the Sahel, with a view of materializing the Integrated Strategy Plan for the Sahel, and we call on the Special Representative to coordinate all strategies and programs towards the achievement of stability and development of the Region.

In this connection, it is important for the Security Council be kept more regularly briefed on the developments taking place in the region.

Finally, we commend the Sahel countries for their joint efforts to resolve outstanding challenges for the continuing work with the international community in the maintenance of peace, security and for the region's development.

I thank you, Mr. President.