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Provisional

President: Mr. Agyeman. (Ghana)

Members:

Albania	Mr. Spasse
Brazil	Mr. De Almeida Filho
China	Mr. Geng Shuang
France	Mr. De Rivière
Gabon	Mrs. Kambangoye Ankassa
India	Mr. Raguttahalli
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Norway	Ms. Juul
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United Arab Emirates	Mrs. Alhefeiti
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Kariuki
United States of America	Mr. Wood

Agenda

Peace and security in Africa

Report of the Secretary-General on the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel (S/2022/838)

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

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/2022/838)

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 Pobee, 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 Mr. Zakaria Ousman Ramadan.

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/2022/838, 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. Pobee.

Ms. Pobee (*spoke in French*): I thank the Security Council for the opportunity to present the report of the Secretary-General on the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel (G-5 Sahel). Since the most recent Security Council meeting on the Sahel (see S/PV.9147), the security situation in the region has continued to deteriorate. The indiscriminate use of violence by terrorist groups means that thousands of innocent civilians are suffering, while millions more are forced to leave their homes. Insecurity is exacerbating an already dire humanitarian situation. Women and children in particular suffer from the lack of access to basic services and are the primary victims of the violence and increasing inequality.

(spoke in English)

Against that backdrop, the G-5 Sahel Joint Force remains an important regionally led component of the response to insecurity in the Sahel. The initiative complements the multifaceted engagement by the United Nations and other regional and international partners. It is therefore regrettable that, in addition to its financial difficulties, the G-5 Sahel Joint Force was

weakened by the withdrawal of Mali in May. The second coup d'état in Burkina Faso, in September, also had a negative impact on the Force's operational capacity and further undermined regional cohesion.

Despite those challenges, the Joint Force continued to conduct military operations across the three sectors of the Joint Force, namely, the central sector in the tri-border area, the western sector at the border between Mali and Mauritania and the eastern sector at the border between Chad and the Niger. In total, seven major military operations have been conducted since May. Looking forward, the development of a new concept of operations for the Joint Force is being considered. The new concept of operations would address the challenges resulting from the evolving security and humanitarian situation and the withdrawal of Mali, while acknowledging the bilateral operations undertaken by neighbouring countries.

Meanwhile, the Executive Secretariat and other components of the G-5 Sahel continued their activities, including the operationalization of its gender policy and training for women leaders on dialogue, in conjunction with the African Union (AU) and the West African Network for Peacebuilding. Other activities were organized jointly by G-5 Sahel entities and donors to strengthen the prevention of violent extremism and empower local authorities in the area of security governance. Several United Nations agencies, funds and programmes continued to implement their programmes in support of the G-5 Sahel, including those involving regional capacity-building in the areas of criminal justice, border security management and the prevention of radicalization and violent extremism.

In line with its Security Council mandate, and as provided for by the technical agreement between the United Nations, the European Union and the G-5 Sahel, the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) continues to provide support to the Joint Force. The Mission works with contractors to deliver life-support consumables to the four contingents of the Force outside Mali. The technical and operational challenges remain a matter of concern, while insecurity and a lack of infrastructure along supply routes continue to pose multiple challenges. As detailed in the Secretary-General's report, divergences among the G-5 Sahel member States, which culminated in the withdrawal of Mali from the organization, further complicated

the implementation of MINUSMA's support to the Joint Force.

Through the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Organization also supports the Joint Force in operationalizing its human rights and international humanitarian law compliance framework. Defeating terrorism and violent extremism requires a comprehensive response and will not be attained through military gains alone. It is important to ensure that the Joint Force integrates human rights and international humanitarian law into the core of its operations. Otherwise it risks fostering further breeding grounds for violent extremist groups, causing ever-increasing suffering for the populations. Similarly, at a national level, G-5 Sahel countries should ensure that their military strategies to counter terrorism and violent extremism are fully anchored in human rights and put the protection of all populations at their core, including when they partner with non-State actors to operate alongside national armies.

A coordinated breakthrough in our response to violent extremism is urgently needed. If we fail in that effort, the effects of terrorism, violent extremism and organized crime will be felt far beyond the Sahel region and, indeed, the African continent. We need to rethink our collective approach and be creative, going beyond existing efforts. In the coming months, it will be crucial for stakeholders in the region to maintain a political dialogue in pursuing their common security objectives. We remain deeply committed to supporting them in that endeavour, working closely with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Union as they lead in resolving the current tensions in the region. Meanwhile, progress can be made at a bilateral level. For instance, we have recently seen national authorities in Burkina Faso and Mali seeking to strengthen their bilateral cooperation in the area of security and defence.

As the security situation worsens in the Sahel, armed groups are tightening their destructive grip on the broader region. The northern regions of the coastal States of the Gulf of Guinea are being increasingly exposed to a spillover of violence and insecurity. In that regard, international partners have indicated their willingness to actively consider extending their support to neighbouring countries in the Gulf of Guinea and West Africa, based on their demands. That is a positive development that will bolster the relevant regional organizations in their counter-terrorism efforts, support

initiatives such as the Accra Initiative and strengthen national strategies for improving living conditions, security and resilience in the most vulnerable regions. It will necessitate a continuing dialogue between the concerned Governments and international partners to ensure that the support is aligned with national and regional priorities.

The Secretariat remains committed to supporting the region as well as the G-5 Sahel. We firmly believe that it is only by working together in a coordinated and complementary manner that we can effectively address the multiple challenges before us. It is in that spirit that the United Nations and the African Union, along with ECOWAS and the G-5 Sahel, are supporting the work of the Independent High-Level Panel on Security and Development in the Sahel led by former President Mahamadou Issoufou of the Niger. At the behest of the Secretary-General and the AU Chairperson, that exercise aims to marshal greater attention and resources at the national, subregional, regional and international levels and propose innovative ways to address the security, governance and development challenges in the region. The initiative will also reach out to national stakeholders and the region's bilateral and multilateral partners to address that shared responsibility. As we await the recommendations of that independent assessment, we look forward to the continued support of the Security Council in working towards a stable, secure, peaceful and prosperous Sahel. Faced with the growing threats to the region and beyond, we urge the international community to remain engaged in a spirit of shared responsibility and solidarity with the populations of the region.

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 would like to congratulate Ghana on its assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month.

I also want to thank Ambassador Agyeman for his invitation to brief the Council on the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel (G-5 Sahel) and all the members of the Council for their attention to my briefing today in this particular context, in which we are considering how to better contribute to combating terrorism in the G-5 Sahel area. I would like to congratulate the Secretary-General on the quality of the report (S/2022/838) just presented, and to thank him

sincerely for his commitment and his steadfastness in support of the G-5 Sahel cause.

It will not have escaped the Security Council's attention that Mali's withdrawal on 15 May from all the G-5 Sahel entities, including its Joint Force, plunged our subregional organization into an institutional crisis, the effects of which are being felt even more strongly by the Joint Force. The consequences of the withdrawal include the relocation of the headquarters from Bamako to N'Djamena, the suspension of support for the operations of the Joint Force by the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) and the impossibility of carrying out joint operations in the three axes, as provided for in the strategic concept of operations (CONOPS).

However, because the G-5 has to continue its mission with the other countries, it was necessary to conduct a review of the CONOPS, and the strategic consideration process for a new reconfiguration of the Force began in Niamey with the fourteenth extraordinary meeting of the Defence and Security Committee on 21 September and a meeting of the Ministers of Defence on 22 September. A number of decisions were taken on the new format of the Joint Force and a road map was drawn up, providing for a meeting of military experts in Ouagadougou and a meeting of ministers in N'Djamena, which was to be held no later than 31 October. Unfortunately, due to the events in Burkina Faso and Chad, those two meetings could not be held. However, the meeting of military experts is now scheduled to take place on 5 December in Nouakchott. In the meantime, the Peace and Security Council of the African Union has been seized with extending the fifth mandate of the Joint Force, a mandate endorsed by the Security Council.

During the current mandate, and despite many difficulties, the Force has been able to conduct operations, as indicated in the report. The positive results have contributed in various ways to improving the security environment in the area of operations. Armed terrorist groups have been neutralized, a number of their members have been arrested and hundreds of weapons and thousands of rounds of ammunition and large quantities of drugs have been seized. All of that was handed over to the national administrative authorities of the territory where the judicialization operation took place. Since the mandate stipulates that the Force must have preventive and investigative police who can support military action, the judicialization of the field of operations of the Joint Force is now a

reality. It is reflected in the growing numbers of people who have been captured, handed over by the provosts to the specialized investigation units and transferred to the specialized judicial units of the G-5 Sahel States for criminal proceedings. Over the past two years, more than a hundred people have been apprehended, the majority of whom were arrested in 2022 alone. These operations, conducted with strict respect for human rights and with the support of international partners, the United Nations, the European Union, the African Union, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and many others, have had mixed results given the magnitude of the threat.

Today the Joint Force has distinguished itself by significantly improving the protection of civilians in its operations and by living among the civilian populations in its areas of operation. In order to strengthen military action to protect civilians, the Executive Secretariat has, working alongside the Joint Force, initiated a process for developing a regional protection-of-civilians strategy with the technical support of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights through its project to support the Joint Force in the implementation of the compliance framework. This strategy, which we hope to see finalized as soon as possible, will be translated into an operational action plan that, when implemented, will help strengthen collaboration and trust among the defence and security forces and the populations to benefit from their actions.

With respect to the implementation of the tripartite technical agreement between the United Nations, the European Union and the G-5 Sahel, we welcome the continuity of MINUSMA's operational and logistical support for the Joint Force battalions, in accordance with the relevant Security Council resolutions. Even if this continuity was achieved without the need for a tripartite meeting, it would be good to consider holding a formal meeting between the three parties after the validation of the new CONOPS. Indeed, Council members will recall that at least one survey on the perception of MINUSMA's support for the Joint Force was conducted, and suggestions were made following the identification of shortcomings. Taking these shortcomings into account, the Secretary-General made proposals to the Security Council, some of which remain relevant because the United Nations must provide operational, tactical and strategic logistical support to the Joint Force, funded by assessed contributions — and for good reason.

The observations in the Secretary-General's report make it very clear that the growing persistence of terrorism in the Sahel constitutes a serious threat to international peace and security. Indeed, the Secretary-General has said this on several occasions. It has always been the message of the leaders of the G-5 Sahel. The struggle they are waging is not for the benefit of the G-5 Sahel countries alone. It is clear today that the situation is even more worrisome than it was in 2017, when the joint military force was created to fight terrorism, cross-border organized crime and human trafficking in the G-5 Sahel space. Today the dam that countries such as Burkina Faso constituted has burst, causing terrorism to spread to the countries of the Gulf of Guinea. Again, this is very sad.

Fortunately, a few days ago, in Ouagadougou, the ECOWAS Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security, Mr. Abdel Fatau Musah — a personality well known to the United Nations — declared that ECOWAS has begun to reflect on its role in order to enable it to assist its members on such issues as terrorism and humanitarian action, because, as he said, one cannot talk about a return to constitutional order in a country that is under the control of terrorists and which is experiencing serious humanitarian problems. In particular, he revealed that the next ECOWAS summit will address the issue of the operationalization of a framework to fight terrorism in the subregion and that it will be a matter of seeing, together with the African Union and the United Nations, how to mobilize a force to come to the aid of Burkina Faso, as the problem is regional.

We are all well aware that despite the undeniable efforts of the Joint Force and the large sums of money spent by countries to build capacity and equip their defence and security forces through various means — and at the expense of other basic social sectors — the security situation continues to deteriorate considerably, as stated in the Secretary-General's report. This deteriorating security situation is undermining the G-5's development actions, as they simply cannot be carried out.

The resilience and hope long nourished by the people of the Sahel to see the end of the tunnel are gradually giving way to anger and frustration towards the public authorities and certain international partners. This feeling, which is widely shared among the population, has been the main reason put forward by the military to justify unconstitutional regime changes. The political

instability coupled with the security crisis is hampering the response initiatives undertaken so far to contain the threat, which is characterized by States losing control over growing areas of their national territories and the displacement of millions of people.

That provides me with the opportunity to salute the dynamic actions of the United Nations agencies in the affected countries to help care for the millions of internally displaced persons. It is obvious that the most ardent wish of all these people, most of whom are women and children, is to return to their respective villages, to live there with dignity, even if they do so in poverty, because what they are experiencing in the camps is unbearable.

The countries of the Sahel in general, and the G-5 Sahel in particular, are greatly weakened by multifaceted crises — security, humanitarian, economic, climatic, and so on — even though they are brimming with enormous potential. There are therefore many vast challenges to be met if peace, security, development and inclusive growth are to be promoted in the Sahel. That is why we welcome and place great hope in the Secretary-General's initiative to conduct a joint strategic assessment on security and development in the Sahel, coordinated by the former President of the Niger, Mr. Mahamadou Issoufou. We strongly hope that this initiative will receive support and assistance from the international community and all partners and friends of the Sahel in the implementation of the strong measures to be recommended by the Independent High-Level Panel.

In the meantime, I reiterate the firm commitment of the Heads of State to continue working together because the reasons that justified the creation of the G-5 Sahel and its Joint Force are even more relevant today. This is therefore not the time to give up. Indeed, the opposite is true, as evidenced by the many meetings I have just mentioned, the continued activities of the Executive Secretariat and the Joint Force, and the development of the new development and security strategy and the drafting of the new priority investment programme, which will be the subject of a workshop on 23 and 24 November in Niamey. Our hope is to submit these important documents, as well as the new CONOPS, to the G-5 authorities, which we expect will meet very soon.

Before concluding, allow me to insist once again on the urgency and necessity of encouraging the G-5 Sahel

and, above all, giving it the greatest possible support. I would like to thank the Assistant Secretary-General who has just reaffirmed her great support for this original regional initiative in its fight against the threat of terrorism and violent extremism in our area. It is unthinkable today to imagine a fight against terrorism that would not start in the Central Sahel or would not rely on existing initiatives to limit or even prevent the expansion of terrorism to the countries of the Gulf of Guinea. In the secrecy of the Council's deliberations, I urge its members to understand the seriousness of the situation and take into account the reality on the ground — a reality that clearly indicates that the hour is grave and that, without a rapid and urgent response, we should fear the emergence of an even greater threat to international peace and security.

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

I now give the floor to Mr. Ramadan.

Mr. Ramadan (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank the President, the Ambassador of the Permanent Mission of Ghana to the United Nations, for giving me the honour of briefing the Security Council to provide it my analysis, as an independent expert, on the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel (G-5 Sahel), a multilateral force that was born of the need to respond to complex and interdependent security issues in the Sahelo-Saharan region — a Sahel that is dying but refuses to die. I will discuss the type and nature of the threats as well as the characteristics of the States they affect. I will deliver a shortened version of my statement.

First, it must be stated that the Sahel's downward spiral began with the great drought of 1973, which is part of what we are experiencing today. The developments in the Sahel over the past 20 years have been characterized by emerging security threats. The Sahelo-Saharan region has faced natural shocks — such as climate change, including drought and floods — as well as regular attacks, including air attacks, and epidemics, pandemics and other hardships. It has also faced political shocks, including coups d'état, rebellions and civil wars and, more recently, terrorism and organized crime.

The result is that the States that are geopolitically part of the Sahel — I say geopolitically because there are 22 countries in the greater Sahel and there is also a geographical and geostrategic Sahel, so that they are therefore part of the G-5 Sahel — are weak, fragile, vulnerable and have little human institutional capacity.

Some of those States face tremendous difficulties in ensuring the security of their own territory and have more areas that are ungoverned or poorly governed than areas that are under effective State control. Some of those States are therefore confronted with internal strife. In such countries, the construction of the nation State has remained an unfinished project. Worse still, the communities that make up the populations of many of the Sahel States have no common aspirations. The establishment of the G-5 Sahel was therefore a welcome regional cooperation initiative.

The collapse of Libya in 2011 had a knock-on effect on the situation in Mali, which was in turn destabilized. The French military's Operation Serval served at the time as a buffer and prevented Mali from disintegrating and falling into the hands of terrorists. Starting from that period, terrorist groups gradually established themselves throughout the Sahel and from bases in the Sahel as a result of the hotspot that Libya had become. Shortly after Operation Serval's intervention, the five countries — Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania, the Niger and Chad — felt the urgency and necessity of creating a regional mutualization framework for responding to security threats, which had become cross-cutting and hybrid.

The G-5 Sahel was therefore created in 2014 to provide a concerted response to all the economic, social, environmental and security problems that characterize the region. The G-5 Sahel opted for a three-pronged approach focused on governance, development and security. The Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel is therefore a commendable tool for security cooperation. On 20 November 2015, the Heads of State of the G-5 Sahel announced the formation of a joint anti-terrorist military force, which was established on 6 February 2017 as the G-5 Sahel Joint Force. Its concept of operations was adopted by the African Union and by the United Nations through resolution 2359 (2017). The Security Council authorized the immediate deployment of a force for a period of 12 months, subject to renewal, with the goal of combating terrorism, drug trafficking and human trafficking in order to create a secure environment by eradicating terrorist and armed group activity and restoring security and peace in accordance with international law.

In that regard, the mission of the G-5 Sahel Joint Force is to conduct operations in accordance with the mandate of the African Union Peace and Security Council in order to contain the terrorist threat. As the

Assistant Secretary-General explained, the Joint Force extends across three zones from Mauritania to Chad: the eastern zone includes the Niger and Chad, the central zone includes Mali, Burkina Faso and the Niger and the western zone includes Mali and Mauritania.

With regard to the Joint Force's track record eight years after the establishment of the G-5 Sahel and five years after its deployment, in my opinion, while the Joint Force has had noble intentions, the results it has achieved to date seem to be mixed, or indeed inadequate. The States have been unable to put in place the means for their goals. Of course, the situation has evolved rapidly. Some requirements have been met, such as the establishment of the unified command posts, the definitive joint theatre command posts in Bamako, the construction of satellite command posts in Wour, more than 20 operations by the Joint Force, as well as the strengthening of their capacity through training. We are operating in a zone that is 5,500 kilometres by 1,000 kilometres. In my view, that result is certainly noble but falls short of expectations and is not commensurate with the terrorist challenge.

Let us look now at the limitations of the Joint Force and the obstacles it faces. The Force has been unable to obtain a robust Security Council mandate under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations. Moreover, the ability of the soldiers of the Joint Force to fulfil their mandate to fight terrorism and cross-border crime is severely limited by the lack of, or obsolete means of, transport for tactical air and ground logistics, as well as the ineffectiveness of the intelligence of the G-5 Sahel States. It is also worth noting that, even before the emergence of terrorists, our armies were not well equipped. The armies were established and have evolved in a spirit of traditional security and were surprised by the emergence of terrorists, who wage asymmetric warfare. Our armies were not prepared for that challenge — either in terms of equipment or training.

Logistical support for the Joint Force therefore remains a permanent challenge given its size — 5,000 to potentially 10,000 troops — and the range of its area of operations. Member States are therefore obliged to turn time and time again to technical and financial partners for logistical support.

In addition, the annual budget for the Joint Force was set at €423 million. From 2018 to date, the Joint Force has received just over 50 per cent of what was supposed

to be its annual budget. A distinct impression emerges that, despite the good intentions and promises made at the donors conference in Brussels, the amount needed to operationalize the Force has not been effectively mobilized. The Joint Force suffers from permanent budgetary uncertainty, especially because the continued commitment of technical and financial partners itself remains uncertain. We also fear donor fatigue for long-term operations. Moreover, the member States of the G-5 Sahel, most of which are poor, are unable to ensure their statutory contributions towards the operation of the Force. Constantly turning to external funding, for which the amount and especially the regularity are beyond our control, for large-scale military operations raises the question of the sustainability of efforts and the capacity of States to ensure their own security.

I would like to underscore three areas of weakness.

The first weakness of the Joint Force is political, as it does not have an extremely robust mandate from the Security Council under Chapter VII of the Charter, which would have provided guidance, more focus and much more resonance.

The second weakness is capability. The Joint Force is struggling to become operational due to a number of challenges, including logistical, financial, strategic and human. Since security is a matter of State sovereignty, by always having recourse to partners, do the G-5 Sahel countries not run the risk of falling into the trap of financial dependence? Indeed, in the context of the hybridization of the threat and the resilience of armed terrorist groups, relying on one's own means to counter terrorism is as unrealistic and unsustainable as not having the means to implement one's politics.

The third weakness is institutional. The weakness of Sahel institutions and the partially dysfunctional role of national security forces, the weakness of national security strategies and the institutional weakness of States, in all truth, do not allow us to contemplate continuous sustainable efforts.

The official end of Operation Barkhane and the shutdown of the operational mechanism in place, which was based on the synergy of forces — national forces, the G-5 Sahel Joint Force, Operation Barkhane and the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali — requires a review of the operational mechanism of the G-5 Sahel Joint Force, as well as its operational capabilities. We must have the courage to undertake that review.

What are the prospects and safe path forward in the short and medium term? Einstein liked to say that insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results. We must absolutely change the situation and our interpretation of it and understand the grave danger posed by terrorism. Today it has moved from the north to the centre of the continent and poses a serious threat to coastal Africa, moving from the west to the east.

In order to ensure the full operationalization of the Joint Force, a number of organizational and operational challenges will have to be overcome.

First, we must meet its operational needs, above all its logistical ones, in line with the Force's standards. We must ensure its sustainability. We must also maintain good relations with the population. It is both unfortunate and regrettable that defence and security forces are often accused of human rights abuses, which often allows the armed terrorist groups to feed their recruitment pipeline on the basis of rancour and revenge. Winning hearts and minds is the first step in the war against terrorism. We must rebuild and equip the joint theatre command posts relocated to N'Djamena, ensure the interoperability of procedures and means and pool the air capabilities of the G-5 Sahel countries. The withdrawal of Mali, a major player in the Joint Force, calls into question the Force's concept of operations by creating a geographical discontinuity in the area of operations through the isolation of Mauritania. That makes it necessary to redefine a new concept of operations that takes the new situation into account.

Finally, we must open up the G-5 Sahel to other countries in the subregion that are plagued by terrorism — an approach that involves sharing experience and expertise as well as enhanced cooperation. That link would connect coastal Africa to the Sahel and the Sahel to the Lake Chad basin and would allow everyone to benefit from synergy in this long-lasting struggle that requires assiduous and continuous efforts.

I have several recommendations. We must advance the new concept of ownership and support by the G-5 Sahel of bilateral and multilateral operations conducted by the armies of the G-5 Sahel member countries. We must promote bilateral operations. We must freeze satellite command posts; establish a Force command post, the content and relocation of which to be determined; postpone the rotation of the personnel

of the joint theatre command post and continue its activities in their current format until the new concept is adopted.

The security solution to the problems of the Sahel is certainly necessary, but it is not enough. It is insufficient to establish a lasting culture of peace. The unstable political situation in certain G-5 Sahel countries and the insecurity in the region, the presence of refugees in the intervention zone and the progressive economic decline could lead to conflicts, thereby undermining development efforts.

I note that, above all, motivation is the DNA of terrorism. But it also depends on capabilities and opportunities. It has been shown that, for people to turn from radicalization to violent extremism, it takes between six and 18 months. We must therefore focus on prevention. We must shift our approach to counterinsurgency by taking into account the non-combatant aspect of a population-centric approach. We must rebuild the Sahelian State and provide it with the necessary capabilities. The State must be a leader, a regulator, a partner, a protector, a fighter and a strategist. It should not be there waiting.

The Sahelian States, individually, are small in relation to the large task. They must work together to make the most of their comparative advantage. There is no alternative to better regional solidarity and broader regional cooperation to realize that vision.

Today Africa's ramparts are being breached on all sides. The terrorist threat is real. The Sahel is rich in resources, both in terms of soil and under the soil. But the real value added of those resources is to ensure security and stability.

Lastly, Sahelian youth are a driving force. They are aware that their numbers — 65 per cent of the population — represent their strength. The young people are highly connected, in a world in which the virtual world has become a reality.

Capacity-building efforts should be directed towards women's groups. Women account for 55 per cent of the population. We cannot ignore them. Women are peacemakers, as are civil society organizations in all their dynamism. The role of civil society organizations as a counterforce to the State must be promoted and strengthened as a bearer of hope for change in the countries of the subregion.

Finally, the private sector must be seen as an essential partner to the State in its efforts to provide jobs for young people. We must reform the private sector and create the necessary environment for it to develop and flourish. To this day, the private sector is essentially informal in nature, since, in the formal sector, the State always has a stranglehold on the goose that lays the golden eggs. It is possible that solutions can be found through the private sector and private initiatives. We therefore must create the right conditions for that.

(spoke in English)

I am very grateful to the Security Council members for taking the time to listen to my briefing on the Joint Force of the G-5 Sahel. I would like to express my endless gratitude to the Permanent Representative of Ghana, the President of the Security Council at this meeting, for inviting me to this forum dedicated to world peace and security. May God bless you and make West Africa and the Sahel a better place in which to live.

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

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements.

Mr. De Rivièrè (France) *(spoke in French)*: I thank the Assistant Secretary-General and the Executive Secretary of the Group of Five for the Sahel (G-5 Sahel) for their briefings.

As has been underscored, the G-5 Sahel is in crisis. It is an institutional crisis caused by Mali's decision to leave the Group. It is a political crisis that requires a return to constitutional order in Mali, Burkina Faso and Chad, as requested by the African Union, the Economic Community of West African States and the Economic Community of Central African States. It is a security crisis, as the terrorist threat is no longer limited to the Sahel but is also spreading to the north of some coastal States. Lastly, it is a humanitarian crisis that is being exacerbated by the war being waged by Russia in Ukraine. All of that is against the backdrop of structural challenges in the areas of development and climate change adaptation.

The international community must continue to heavily mobilize in support of the Sahel. We must not forget all that has been achieved. The Sahel Alliance has more than 17 partners and 1,200 projects, notably in the areas of rural development, energy and education,

totalling more than €26 billion, which is allocated to the priorities of the G-5 Sahel and its member States.

Since 2017, the Joint Force of the G-5 Sahel has conducted dozens of operations, led by thousands of soldiers and officers who have learned to fight together for a common cause. We must acknowledge such progress and continue that support to prevent backsliding. However, those efforts were not enough to stabilize the region. We must therefore change our approach.

France welcomes the decision of the Secretary-General and the Chairperson of the African Union Commission to ask former President Issoufou for an independent assessment of the international support for the Sahel. That assessment is necessary for the purpose of reviewing the efforts made to date and proposing innovative solutions.

First, with regard to the issue of funding, France, the European Union and other partners supported the Joint Force of the G-5 Sahel. The United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali continues to provide logistical support, but the international community has been unable to mobilize the required resources. France therefore calls for sustainable and predictable funding for African peace operations, including through United Nations assessed contributions or in the context of an innovative mechanism that would combine them with bilateral contributions.

Secondly, the right format must be identified. Given the evolving threat, we cannot limit ourselves to the founding countries of the G-5 Sahel. We must also consider other regional initiatives, such as the Accra Initiative, and all possible means of strengthening cooperation between Sahelian and coastal countries. Regional solutions must go hand in hand with the strengthening of national armies.

President Macron announced the end of Operation Barkhane, but he also confirmed France's ongoing support for the States of the region. France will continue to provide assistance to those that request it, through a partnership approach and in support of the national strategies of the States concerned.

Thirdly and finally, strengthening the rule of law must be a priority. France welcomes the commitment of the G-5 Sahel and the African Union to developing human rights compliance frameworks, with the support

of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the European Union. We call for those initiatives to be continued and strengthened. However, we must oppose any initiative that would roll back fundamental freedoms under the pretext of the fight against terrorism. That is the approach proposed by the private military company Wagner Group, whose abuses and plunder of natural resources serve only to fuel a dangerous spiral of violence.

Strengthening the rule of law also means giving full rein to civil society and organizations working for the full and effective participation of women and young people and to defend human rights. That was the message conveyed at the Montpellier summit organized by President Macron a year ago.

Mr. Wood (United States of America): I thank Assistant Secretary-General Pobee and Executive Secretary Tiaré for their informative briefings.

The United States is growing increasingly concerned about the security, humanitarian and political crises unfolding in the Sahel. The region has witnessed a dramatic increase in the strength and influence of violent extremist groups. Threats to civilians, reports of human rights abuses and violations and levels of displacement and humanitarian need are all on the rise. Yet another military takeover in Burkina Faso marks the most recent indication of democratic backsliding in the region. The situation in the Sahel remains an urgent priority for the Security Council.

The United States is of the firm view that instability in the Sahel is a security problem with a democratic governance solution. Violent extremism thrives when State authorities are absent, the delivery of services is weak, democracy is fragile or fleeting, justice is inaccessible and economic and political exclusion prevail. Population growth, displacement and a changing climate exacerbate those governance failures by undermining traditional livelihoods and creating new competition over vital resources. Women and young people are disproportionately affected by those challenges, fuelling greater inequality and injustice.

As a leading provider of bilateral humanitarian and other forms of assistance, the United States urges Sahelian Governments to focus on the structural drivers of instability in order to build a new social compact with their peoples and lay the groundwork for lasting peace and security. Three of the five Sahel Governments — Burkina Faso, Chad and Mali — are

currently neither democratically elected nor civilian-led. That increases tensions and dramatically inhibits the ability of foreign partners to provide security and other assistance. To allow foreign partners to resume their currently restricted international support, we urge Mali, Burkina Faso and Chad to continue on the path to timely, durable and inclusive democratic transitions.

While we welcomed in July the agreement between Mali and the Economic Community of West African States for its return to democratic rule, we encourage Mali to strictly adhere to the timetables agreed upon for holding elections. The United States remains committed and ready to support Malians in that effort.

In September, Burkina Faso experienced its second military takeover in just nine months. We welcomed assurances in October from Burkina Faso's transition President that he would adhere to the previous transition authorities' commitment to the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to hold democratic elections in July 2024.

We are concerned about Chad's decisions to extend its transition, deviating from African Union guidelines for democratic transitions, as well as its violent crackdown on demonstrators. We urge Chad to ensure accountability for those responsible for such violence and ensure an inclusive process for drafting a new constitution and organizing elections with independent oversight. The authorities in Mali, Burkina Faso and Chad must facilitate reforms that ultimately result in free and fair elections that yield a return to democratically elected civilian rule.

We remain disappointed with the Malian authorities' unfortunate decision to withdraw from the Group of Five for the Sahel (G-5 Sahel), which significantly weakens an organization specifically designed to address the scourge of terrorism within Mali's borders and throughout its neighbourhood. In Mali and elsewhere in Africa, Council members and Member States can contribute to peace and security by supporting United Nations listings of affiliates of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham and Al-Qaida and supporters that remain undesignated and pose serious threats to peace and stability in the region and indeed globally.

The United States is further concerned about short-sighted security partnerships with the Kremlin-backed Wagner Group, whose forces are exploiting natural resources and actively undermining stability in Mali and

elsewhere in Africa. In Mali, allegations of human rights abuses have skyrocketed as a result of Wagner Group operations in the name of so-called counter-terrorism that often target marginalized groups. Kremlin-linked disinformation and propaganda campaigns are inciting violence against United Nations forces' personnel and are undermining the local support that the United Nations needs to do its work. Meanwhile, Wagner Group forces are obstructing United Nations peacekeepers in Mali, who are mandated by the Council to support stabilization efforts, protect civilians, investigate and monitor human rights abuses and violations, assist in the delivery of humanitarian aid and put the country on a path to peace and democratic rule. The Malian transition Government's efforts to impair the freedom of movement of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali in order to create space for the Wagner Group are putting the Mission and its personnel in jeopardy.

The United States stands alongside institutions working to build greater governance and security force capacities, promote sustainable development and prevent democratic backsliding. We look forward to the joint strategic assessment on the Sahel being undertaken by the United Nations, the African Union, ECOWAS and the G-5 Sahel. We hope that effort results in an honest assessment of the overlapping governance, security and economic challenges undermining peace and security in the region. The United States will use those findings to consider how we can deepen and expand our support for effective, well-coordinated solutions.

Ms. Moran (Ireland): I would like to thank Assistant Secretary-General Pobee and Executive Secretary Tiaré for their briefings this morning.

Since we last met on the Group of Five for the Sahel (G-5 Sahel) six months ago (see S/PV.9147), the situation has continued to deteriorate rapidly. Ireland is gravely concerned about the ongoing violence across the Sahel, which is now expanding into coastal West Africa. By July of this year, more civilians had been killed in the region than in all of 2021. A solution that places the protection of civilians at its centre is urgently needed. Regional leadership and cooperation is a crucial part of any solution. It is therefore of great concern that political divergences between the G-5 Sahel member States are negatively affecting the operationalization of the G-5 Sahel Joint Force. We urge further coordination between the various initiatives in the region, including

the Accra Initiative, the Nouakchott process and the G-5 Sahel Joint Force.

All security responses must comply with international law, including international human rights law and international humanitarian law. Compliance is a prerequisite for the mobilization of international support for regional initiatives. We commend the continued work of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to support the G-5 Sahel Joint Force in that regard. We also encourage States to ensure that mitigation measures, as recommended under the United Nations Human Rights Due Diligence Policy, are implemented.

We are extremely concerned about the presence of the Wagner Group in the region. The violations and abuses of international human rights law and international humanitarian law that States are obliged to prevent, investigate and punish include acts committed by mercenaries and private military companies. Such violations and abuses serve only to drive radicalization and contribute to the growth of terrorism and violent extremism.

We know that militarized counter-terrorism responses alone are not sufficient to tackle the multidimensional crisis facing the Sahel. The fact that terrorist groups continue to exploit existing fragilities, political instability and the lack of social and economic opportunities shows us that a holistic and comprehensive response is required. Any successful response is predicated on political stability in the region. We urge the transitional authorities in Burkina Faso, Mali and Chad to make rapid progress on their political transitions. They must stick to the agreed timelines and quickly organize credible, inclusive and transparent elections that result in a peaceful handover of power. Women, young people and civil society must be front and centre in those processes. We continue to support the leadership of the Economic Community of West African States and the African Union in their ongoing efforts to advance a return to civilian-led constitutional order in the region.

The dire humanitarian situation must also be addressed. In 2022, the Sahel will experience its worst food crisis in 10 years, with 34.5 million people currently facing food insecurity. That number is set only to rise as millions of people continue to be displaced because of the deteriorating security situation and the climate

crisis. And the people of the Sahel are at the forefront of the climate crisis. They are witnessing its effects first-hand as it threatens their lives and livelihoods. There is no doubt that the impact of climate change is heightening risks and tensions and contributing to conflict and fragility. It is abundantly clear that the multiple crises facing the Sahel are interconnected, and as such, our responses must also be interlinked.

Ireland looks forward to the outcomes of the joint strategic assessment of the Independent High-Level Panel on Security and Development in the Sahel and the internal review of MINUSMA. Those important assessments must provide a way forward to enable us to make concrete progress on the many crises facing the Sahel today.

Ms. Evstigneeva (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): I would like to thank Assistant Secretary-General Pobe and the other briefers for their statements.

Unfortunately, the situation in the Sahel is not improving — we completely agree with the Assistant Secretary-General in that regard. The terrorist activity in the region is not subsiding, while acute inter-ethnic and intercommunal conflicts persist, which is having an extremely negative impact on the security situation. Dozens of troops and hundreds of civilians are dying at the hands of militants. The grave challenges facing the countries of the region are a legacy of many years of unresolved problems on the security, counter-terrorism, socioeconomic and humanitarian fronts.

A new destabilizing factor has been the sharp uptick in attempts to turn the Sahel into another theatre for geopolitical confrontation, which runs counter to the national interests of the States and peoples of the region. In that regard, it was internal disagreements within the Group of Five for the Sahel (G-5 Sahel), to a great extent externally provoked, that forced Mali to leave the organization on 15 May, meaning that future activities of the G-5 Sahel will require significant adjustments.

Russia is convinced of the importance of coordinating the efforts of the African Union, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and other regional organizations aimed at combating terrorism in the Sahel. The tradition of African mutual assistance, based on a deep understanding of national needs, can help contribute to the adoption of urgent measures to strengthen security structures and State institutions, resolve socioeconomic issues and protect human rights. It will be crucial to

prevent the further radicalization of the population, especially young people. In that context, we note the extraordinary session held in the capital of Algeria on 13 October of the Joint Operational Committee of the Chiefs of Staff of Algeria, Mauritania, Mali and the Niger, where a general desire to continue coordination to ensure peace and security in the region was expressed. We support the message resulting from the high-level meeting in New York on 26 September as part of the initiative launched during the summer by the African Union, the United Nations, ECOWAS and the G-5 Sahel on security, governance and development in the Sahel on the importance of taking additional collective measures to improve the situation in the region.

It is important to note that international assistance provided to the States of the Sahel should be based on the principle of non-interference in States' internal affairs, respect for their national sovereignty and the principle of African solutions to African problems. The return of a number of States in the region to constitutional order, which we are convinced is necessary, must be effected without attempts to impose foreign prescriptions and must be based on careful and realistic assessments of the situation.

That is what guides our country's bilateral assistance for those in need. Mali is a good example of that. Like the transitional authorities of that country, we are convinced that the liberation of Mali's territories from terrorists and fighters is a priority for ensuring the successful completion of the transitional period and the holding of general elections. In that regard, with the support of Russian trainers, the Malian armed forces have achieved impressive successes in the fight against terrorism in 2022, by all accounts far exceeding what had been done in previous years. Unlike its Western counterparts, Russia provides military and technical assistance to Bamako without any political conditions. Our relations are based on the long-standing principle of equitable bilateral cooperation and an understanding of our common goal of combating the global evil of terrorism.

Today we have heard, and will probably hear more, attempts to slander my country's assistance to Mali and other countries in Africa. Stories about Russian mercenaries are being spread by those who have sent their own mercenaries to the continent for many decades now to overthrow unwanted regimes and control its natural wealth. The consistency with which our American counterparts speak about the

Wagner Group in their statements shows exactly what Washington is concerned about.

In addition, Washington endlessly lectures others about how to run their countries, who they should cooperate with and how they should extract and use their resources, including whom they should sell them to. It acts as if it knows better than the countries of the region how they should govern themselves and how they should deal with their own wealth and resources. Russia will never — and has never — done such a thing on the continent. Our assistance has always had a legitimate basis, in which the interests of the host countries and their populations are an unconditional priority for us.

Russia will continue to participate constructively in the collective efforts to ensure stability in the Sahelo-Saharan region and will continue supporting the Sahel on a bilateral basis in order to increase the military preparedness of its armed forces, military personnel in training and law enforcement agents. We will also provide humanitarian assistance, including for education and health care.

Mr. De La Fuente Ramírez (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Assistant Secretary-General Martha Pobe, Executive Secretary Eric Tiaré and Mr. Ousman Ramadan for their briefings.

The briefings that we just heard show us the difficult security situation in the Sahel. The activities of terrorist organizations, intercommunal violence and organized crime particularly affect the border areas, the size and porous nature of which complicate security tasks.

Given that reality, cooperation among the countries of the region, especially along the borders, is an essential tool for containing the spread of violence and illicit trafficking, including arms trafficking. The principles on which the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel (G-5 Sahel) was established to respond to the security challenges in precisely those areas therefore remain valid and relevant.

It is clear that the progress made in the operationalization of the Joint Force is now being called into question by Mali's decision to withdraw from the partnership. Without Mali, the Group loses its geographical contiguity, is weakened politically and faces greater difficulties in effectively countering terrorism.

We welcome the diplomatic efforts of the countries of the region, the Economic Community of West African

States (ECOWAS) and the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) to seek Mali's reintegration into the G-5 Sahel. We will closely follow the summit scheduled to take place in Mauritania, and we hope that the participants will reach agreement on revitalizing regional cooperation.

Given the uncertainty over the future of the G-5 Sahel, we reiterate our call for enhanced bilateral cooperation. That is key to enabling the countries of the region to protect civilians, who are the main victims of the wave of violence that is sweeping across the Sahel, and which continues to move towards the countries bordering the Gulf of Guinea.

Recent changes in the regional security architecture, the end of Operation Barkhane and the recent announcement by some countries of the withdrawal of their troops from the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) also represent a major challenge. But, at the same time, they may provide an opportunity to develop a new security strategy for the Sahel that better responds to the interests of the countries of the region.

For its part, the international community must take advantage of such adjustments to coordinate the work of the remaining mechanisms more efficiently. I am referring to the work of UNOWAS, the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel and MINUSMA itself. We hope that the Independent High-Level Panel on Security and Development in the Sahel will produce concrete proposals to render the organizations and agencies working in the region more effective and reflect the priorities identified by the Sahel States.

In that regard, priority should be given to restoring constitutional order in countries that have experienced coups d'état. Mexico urges the transitional authorities in Burkina Faso, Chad and Mali to commit to restoring civilian Governments through inclusive political processes, with the full and equal participation of women and young people. The role of subregional organizations, in particular ECOWAS, is important for a return to constitutional order. We emphasize that, without political stability, counter-terrorism strategies are unlikely to produce the desired results.

Finally, we stress the need to complement security strategies with measures to address the root causes of the conflict, such as poverty, inequality and corruption. We also highlight the fact that the fight against terrorism

should be conducted within the context of international human rights law and international humanitarian law.

Mr. Kariuki (United Kingdom): I thank Assistant Secretary-General Pobee, Executive Secretary Tiaré and Mr. Ousman Ramadan for their briefings.

The regional picture in the Sahel is stark. Countries are facing unprecedented challenges with escalating violence, rising humanitarian needs and famine-like conditions. As always, it is ordinary people who suffer the most. The United Kingdom remains committed to supporting the people of the Sahel. Last year, we contributed approximately \$355 million to the region. However, if our collective response to those challenges is to be sustainable, the right conditions need to be in place.

First, political will is needed to deliver accountable governance, the rule of law and justice. With three countries in the region now in the midst of political transitions, continued engagement with the Economic Community of West African States and the African Union is vital. We urge the Burkina Faso, Chadian and Malian authorities to prepare for elections through open dialogue with civil society, including women and young people.

Secondly, effective counter-terrorism and respect for human rights must go hand in hand. To do otherwise risks aggravating grievances, undermining trust with local communities and driving recruitment to terrorist groups. The harmful impact of Wagner Group operations on civilians in Mali and elsewhere on the continent is by now well documented. That is why the Wagner Group will not succeed in Mali and why they are not the right answer for any other country in the region.

We welcome the United Nations efforts to build the capacities of the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel for human rights compliance, but we urge the Joint Force to implement the mitigation measures identified under human rights due diligence assessments, as a condition of support from the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali.

Finally, like others, we look forward to the outcome of the strategic assessment on the Sahel of the Independent High-Level Panel on Security and Development in the Sahel. We also look forward to the forthcoming discussions in the region on the Accra

Initiative. Together they will help us to identify how best to work together to support regional security.

The United Kingdom remains committed to helping address the Sahel's challenges through a holistic approach, with accountable governance and human rights at its heart.

Mr. Geng Shuang (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Assistant Secretary-General Pobee and the Executive Secretary of the Group of Five for the Sahel (G-5 Sahel), Mr. Tiaré, for their briefings. I have also listened attentively to Mr. Ramadan's statement.

Recently, in the face of many difficulties, countries in the Sahel have stepped up their diplomatic efforts, enhanced regional coordination and worked together to combat terrorism, which has produced some results. Meanwhile, regional countries are still facing a series of severe challenges in the security, development and humanitarian fields.

At a high-level meeting on the Sahel in September, Secretary-General Guterres called for greater measures to tackle the problems plaguing the Sahel. The international community should take action and actively respond to the Secretary-General's call to help the regional countries better cope with the current situation.

In that context, I would like to make the following three points.

First, dialogue and cooperation must continue and common security in the region must be firmly safeguarded. The Sahel region is an inseparable security community. Only through shared goodwill and uniting as one can the countries there effectively deal with the threats to their common security.

Admittedly, owing to the different national conditions, the countries inevitably may have different views on regional security cooperation. The right approach is to seek common ground while putting aside differences and, on the basis of respecting each other's interests and concerns, find the biggest common denominator through dialogue and consultation.

China supports countries in the Sahel in strengthening political solidarity, working hard to remove the obstacles in the way of regional security cooperation and restoring the normal operation of the G-5 Sahel mechanism. Countries in the Sahel and West Africa should pool their resources, increase

coordination and curb the spread of terrorist forces to countries along the Gulf of Guinea.

China supports the United Nations-African Union joint assessment of the Sahel and looks forward to pragmatic and feasible recommendations emanating from the relevant assessments to reactivate the overall cooperation in counter-terrorism in the Sahel and in West Africa.

Secondly, the counter-terrorism foundation must continue to be strengthened and counter-terrorism capacity-building must continue to be improved. Terrorist forces are running amok in countries such as Mali, Burkina Faso and the Niger, showing a pattern of cross-border linkages and multipoint outbreaks. During the reporting period, the G-5 Sahel Joint Force carried out several counter-terrorism operations, which are instrumental to maintaining regional security and stability. The Joint Force remains an important force to be reckoned with in the regional counter-terrorism effort. We should support it in continuing its effective role in view of the real difficulties faced by the Joint Force in terms of arms and equipment, logistical supplies and financial resources, among others. The international community, and in particular traditional partners, should continue to provide strong support. The United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali should continue to play its role in logistical support.

The Security Council should attach importance to the line of thinking set out by Secretary-General Guterres and seriously study providing financial support to the G-5 Sahel Joint Force through the United Nations regular budget or peacekeeping assessments.

Thirdly, development must continue to be prioritized and commitment to addressing the root causes of conflicts must be maintained. The myriad security issues in the Sahel are, in the final analysis, interconnected with development. China welcomes the formal establishment of the Independent High-Level Panel on Security and Development in the Sahel and expects the Panel to base itself firmly on a proper handling of the dialectical relationship between security and development, with a view to contributing wisdom to meet regional challenges and making pragmatic and feasible policy recommendations.

The international community should, in the light of the needs of regional countries, increase development and humanitarian assistance. The European Union and

other major donors should continue to increase financial assistance to jointly help countries in the region embark on the path of sustainable development and eliminate the breeding grounds of extremist forces and terrorism.

Some countries are concerned about the problem of climate change in the Sahel. It is imperative to tailor the medicine to the symptoms, by helping countries in the region improve through development and their capacity and resilience to cope with climate change and blocking the chain of transmission from climate change to security risks.

China is an active supporter of the cause of peace and development in the Sahel. Under the framework of the Forum on China–Africa Cooperation, the joint construction of the Belt and Road Initiative projects and the Global Development Initiative, China has provided, to the best of its abilities, assistance to the countries of the region. The most recent example is that, as of 1 December, China will grant zero-tariff treatment to 98 per cent of the products of least developed countries such as Burkina Faso.

Looking to the future, China will continue to work with the international community to provide sustainable and predictable support and assistance to countries in the Sahel and make greater contributions to attaining lasting peace and sustainable development in the region.

Mr. De Almeida Filho (Brazil): I thank Assistant Secretary-General Martha Pobe, Executive Secretary Eric Tiaré and Mr. Ramadan for their informative briefings.

When the Council last met to discuss the Group of Five for the Sahel (G-5 Sahel) (see S/PV.9035), we had only recently learned about Mali's decision to quit that group and all its bodies, including the Joint Force. On that occasion, we remarked how the political situation in the region was hampering efforts to combat violence. The violence and the security threats, in turn, made political solutions to conflict harder to achieve.

Now, six months later, we observe that, thankfully, the G-5 Sahel has proven to be a resilient mechanism. Not only does the group continue to operate, but also it has managed to hold its first meeting of the Defence and Security Committee, at the level of ministers of defence and chiefs of staff of the armies, since 2021.

Moreover, the Joint Force has been able to conduct military operations in all three sectors of activities, in

spite of having had to deal with challenges, namely, first, the transfer of its headquarters and other adjustments owing to the exit of Mali and, secondly, the departure of Operation Barkhane from that country.

Although we may take heart in the continuity of activities of the G-5 Sahel and its Joint Force, it cannot be denied that they could do more if the right political circumstances were in place. The decision of one of the five countries to leave the group presented problems that require resources. It also limits the Joint Force activities in some of the most critical terrains in the fight against terrorism in Africa. Added to that, the recent unconstitutional change of Government in Burkina Faso, for the second time in eight months, contrasts with the progress that had been achieved in the negotiations in the return of constitutional order by July 2024. Those changes in the political reality of Burkina Faso also affect the activities of the Joint Force.

These difficulties are all the more regrettable because the humanitarian situation in the Sahel remains dire. Food insecurity, displacement of people and increasing intercommunal and farmer-herder conflicts are aggravated by the expansion of the areas affected by terrorist and other illegal armed groups. The response to these problems depends on continued cooperation among the Sahel countries and with the West African nations and regional organizations and the wider international community.

Brazil was encouraged by the announcement in early July that Mali and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) had come to an agreement on a time frame for the return of the constitutional order and the holding of elections. Brazil also welcomed the fact that ECOWAS leaders have deemed conditions to be in place for the lifting of sanctions against that country. These are signs that regional diplomacy and dialogue can achieve concrete results. We urge the authorities of Mali and its neighbours to continue to cooperate, be it in ECOWAS or in other forums.

We were also encouraged by the launch of the Independent High-Level Panel on Security and Development in the Sahel, in New York, during the high-level week of the seventy-seventh session of the General Assembly. We look forward to its recommendations to be included in the independent strategic assessment currently being prepared.

All the efforts to bring peace and security to the region of the Sahel cannot succeed unless there are

concrete results in the fight against malnutrition, unemployment and social exclusion. Peace and development are interlinked and cannot exist separately. The crisis in the Sahel is multidimensional. The G-5 Sahel and its Joint Force are essential tools for tackling the issues that afflict the region, but they must be complemented by the work of regional and international organizations, including in the humanitarian and development dimensions. Brazil will continue to give its full support for those efforts.

Mr. Spasse (Albania): I thank Assistant Secretary-General Martha Pobeë, Group of Five for the Sahel (G-5 Sahel) Executive Secretary Eric Tiaré and Mr. Zakaria Ousman Ramadan for their briefings and insights today.

This discussion comes at a critical time for the G-5 Sahel, as the region grapples with multidimensional challenges, record insecurity and a lack of State presence. A strong and effective Joint Force remains critical to tackling security threats. Allow me to make three brief points.

First, we remain deeply concerned at the growing trend of unconstitutional changes of Government in the region, which presents significant challenges to preserving the democratic model of governance in West Africa. In Burkina Faso, the second military coup this year has yet to show an improvement in the situation, and armed groups continue to gain ground across the country. We urge the authorities to develop a concrete vision for improving the situation and filling the security vacuums. In Chad, the extension of the transition period and the escalation of violence are deeply concerning. We strongly condemn the use of violence by security forces against civilians and the arbitrary arrests of protesters. We urge all reports of abuses and violations to be investigated. We regret Mali's decision to withdraw from the G-5 Sahel at a time when regional cooperation to counter terrorism is more necessary than ever. We call on Burkina Faso, Chad and Mali to intensify their efforts to facilitate a return to constitutional order and civilian rule.

Secondly, the Sahel is worrisomely becoming the new epicentre of terrorism and violent extremism. This constitutes a serious threat to international peace and security, and we have also seen the threat gradually spill into the littoral States along the Gulf of Guinea. We call on States of the region to intensify their collaboration under the Accra Initiative to prevent this spillover and strengthen their cross-border cooperation.

Civilians are bearing the highest cost of this growing insecurity. Albania echoes the calls of the Secretary-General for the Joint Force to remain an important regionally led component to respond to the terrorism and violent extremism in the Sahel and beyond. In that regard, we urge that respect for human rights and international humanitarian law obligations during military operations remains of utmost importance. We note that the recent reports of violations and executions are deeply concerning and that the operations conducted with the Wagner Group in Mali have failed to improve the security situation, emboldening, instead, the terrorist groups in the country.

Thirdly, we strongly believe that regional cooperation remains essential for the stability of the region. In that regard, a multidimensional approach is critical to addressing the root causes of the security challenges facing the countries of the Sahel. Resources must also be channelled to such existing frameworks as the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel that were created as instruments to foster coordination. We welcome the United Nations-African Union High-Level Panel under way and anticipate its recommendations to strengthen the response to the Sahel crisis. We must focus on prioritizing real political dialogue with Sahel partners.

Finally, Albania believes that the G-5 Sahel is an important initiative for tackling the insecurity and terrorism in the Sahel. We call on all members of the Group to play their part and strengthen their collective action.

Mrs. Alhfeiti (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank Ms. Martha Pobeé and Mr. Eric Tiaré for their comprehensive briefings. We also listened to the briefing of Mr. Zakaria Ramadan.

The United Arab Emirates attaches special importance to achieving peace and security in the Sahel region. Despite the many extremely complex challenges in the region, we remain hopeful that the countries can overcome those difficulties and achieve a more stable and prosperous future for its peoples, 60 per cent of whom, according to UNICEF, are under the age of 24. That means we are talking about the future of more than 300 million young men and women who deserve a real opportunity to contribute to building their communities.

Addressing those challenges in the region will not be possible without continued and intensified regional cooperation and strong support from the international community. We note here the important role that the Group of Five for the Sahel (G-5 Sahel) and its Joint Force continue to play with regard to identifying gaps that undermine stability, presenting recommendations on how to resolve them, as well as exchanging information and unifying efforts to restore security in the region.

In that context, we stress in the importance of maintaining and building upon the current diplomatic efforts among the countries of the region to serve their interests and the aspirations of their peoples, including preserving the political unity of the G-5 Sahel, as highlighted by the Peacebuilding Commission. We also emphasize the need to continue dialogue and cooperation among the countries of the region, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Union. The same applies to the positive communication between ECOWAS and the authorities in Mali, which we hope will contribute to addressing regional challenges, including the scourge of extremism and terrorism.

We are all aware of the magnitude of the security threats in the Sahel region owing to the growing activities of terrorist groups, which continue to undermine development efforts, tear apart the social fabric and pose a threat to the authority of States. While several initiatives have been launched to confront those challenges, whether through bilateral cooperation or multilateral action, the road ahead remains long. We must all maintain our focus on countering extremism and terrorism. The United Arab Emirates therefore supports the G-5 Sahel and its Joint Force and commend the continued technical support provided to the Joint Force by the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA).

We hope that the recommendations put forward by the Independent High-Level Panel on Security and Development in the Sahel, led by His Excellency Mr. Mahamadou Issoufou, will provide us with a clearer view of the region's needs and help to find sustained and effective solutions to its complex challenges.

Achieving stability in the long term requires an integrated and multisectoral approach that addresses the root causes of violence, protects communities from extremism and terrorism and promotes investment

in human wealth. It is also important to take into consideration the specificities of countries, which requires that we continue empowering them and building their capacities to ensure the comprehensive delivery of basic services to all segments of the population. It is therefore crucial to continue efforts to implement the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel, whose goals include sustainable development, security and capacity-building in States to foster institution-building. In that regard, we reiterate the need to ensure the participation of women and youth in those efforts and their economic empowerment, while providing them with opportunities to enable them to play an active role in their communities.

It is also important to address the impact of climate change on the security and stability of the Sahel, which, regrettably, is exposed to hazards — such as desertification, drought and flooding — that exacerbate humanitarian crises in the region and lead to tensions between farmers and herders as a result of competition over limited resources. There are also increased concerns about the sharp decline in the Lake Chad water level and the high level of desertification in the Lake Chad basin. Consequently, the United Arab Emirates believes there is a need to provide additional support to promote resilience against climate change, including through the pastoral system, which is a source of income for more than 20 million people in the region.

In conclusion, we reaffirm the commitment of the United Arab Emirates to support the States members of the G-5 Sahel and the peoples of the wider region in their quest for stability, security and prosperity.

Mr. Ragutthalli (India): At the outset, I would like to thank Assistant Secretary-General Martha Pobe, Executive Secretary of the Group of Five for the Sahel (G-5 Sahel) Eric Tiaré and civil society representative Zakaria Ramadan for their briefings.

The security situation in many Sahelian countries continued to worsen over the past six months. That has further expanded the existing security vacuum in large parts of the Sahel, which continues to be exploited by terrorist groups, including those affiliated with Al-Qaida and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant. Those groups are growing in strength and expanding their presence further south towards the coast into littoral States, with greater access to arms, equipment, technology and financial resources. The increasing entrenchment of those groups and their growing nexus

with organized criminal and pirate networks remains a worrisome development.

Terrorism in the Sahel and West Africa is no longer a regional security threat but rather a global security threat, which needs to be dealt with by effective counter-terrorism measures at all levels — national, regional and international. However, at present those efforts fall short of effectively combating terrorism in the region. As evident from the report of the Secretary-General (S/2022/838), the operational tempo of the Joint Force of the G-5 Sahel decreased significantly following the unfortunate withdrawal of Mali from the Force in May this year, as well as the departure of international security forces from the Sahel.

With that in the background, let me make the following five points, which are important submissions for any significant difference in reversing the worsening security trend in the Sahel.

First, as reported by the Secretary-General in his report, terrorism remains the most serious threat in the Sahel and West Africa. Only a zero-tolerance approach can eliminate that threat from the region and beyond. The report also refrains from making any artificial linkage between climate change and the insecurity facing the Sahelian countries, and we note with appreciation that rational and objective approach.

Secondly, duly acknowledging the magnitude of the terrorist threat to West Africa and the Sahel is a prerequisite for achieving any meaningful peace in the region. Equally important is recognizing the role of regional security initiatives, such as the Joint Force of the G-5 Sahel, in accomplishing those goals. Effective collaboration and trust among G-5 Sahel countries remain paramount to the success of counter-terrorism operations. We also believe that the political unity of the G-5 Sahel is important to sustaining the gains made so far, in addition to addressing its logistical and financial shortcomings. In that regard, we welcome ongoing efforts to encourage Mali to rejoin the G-5 Sahel.

Thirdly, it is important that traditional peacekeeping be complemented by regional operations to neutralize terrorist groups and entities. As the guardian of international peace and security, the Security Council needs to improve its peacekeeping toolkit by developing an effective model to support regional security initiatives. As evident from the Secretary-General's report and remarks by the briefers, the G-5 Sahel Force suffers from capacity constraints, such as the lack of

training, equipment, air assets, logistical support and so on. The United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) and other international partners have been supporting the Joint Force. However, that has not been enough to sustain the Force. Therefore, fourthly, providing sustainable and predictable support to the Joint Force, including through United Nations assessed contributions, requires our serious consideration.

Lastly, peace in Mali is a prerequisite for peace in the Sahel. The key to peace in Mali lies in a Malian-owned and Malian-led process that is seen by the people of Mali as inclusive and representative. We appreciate the understanding reached between Mali and the Economic Community of West African States with respect to the transition timeline and hope that the political, electoral and administrative reforms undertaken by the Malian transition authorities will pave the way for the return to constitutional order. The Security Council, MINUSMA and international partners should encourage all stakeholders to work towards achieving that goal.

In conclusion, let me say that, as a country that has faced the threat of terrorism for more than three decades, India fully understands the pressing security needs of Africa. India has a long history of contributing to the defence and security needs of the African continent, including those of the countries of the Sahel. We remain committed to supporting them by exchanging expertise and providing counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism training for their defence and security forces.

Ms. Juul (Norway): I thank the briefers for their insights.

In the Security Council, Norway has backed the Secretary-General's call for a United Nations support office for the Group of Five for the Sahel (G-5 Sahel). We have done so out of the conviction that regional peace operations with African Union mandates can supplement United Nations peace operations, such as the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali, especially in cross-border counter-terrorism responses.

We regret that a lack of resources has hampered the G-5 Sahel's effectiveness and cooperation. We are also not blind to the consequences of Mali's withdrawal and the presence of the Wagner Group. Yet, if provided with sufficient political will and resources, the G-5 Sahel could, hopefully, still provide a model for future

regional cooperation. That also goes for the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights-supported compliance framework for the G-5 Sahel, which should continue its commendable efforts in promoting respect for human rights and international humanitarian law.

The security and humanitarian crises in the Sahel have had a devastating impact on civilians, including children. Their protection must be a priority.

We hope that experiences drawn from the G-5 Sahel will be part of ideas brought forward by the Independent High-Level Panel on Security and Development in the Sahel — the Issoufou Panel. Norway actively supports the Panel and will approach its recommendations with an open mind. We realize that it cannot magically fix all problems, but we hope that it will present innovative yet practical and realistic proposals, which should also have firm ownership in the region. The goal should not be to reinvent the wheel or introduce another strategy to the Sahel region. Instead, it could build on what is already there — the G-5 Sahel, the Accra Initiative, the Multinational Joint Task Force, the Nouakchott process, the efforts of the Economic Community of West African States and other building blocks — and propose ways to improve them all holistically. In doing so, the Panel could also draw from other contexts, such as the close and functioning United Nations-AU partnership in Somalia.

We must support good and legitimate governance as an essential bulwark in combating violent extremism. As Ms. Comfort Ero, the Director of the International Crisis Group, mentioned last week (see S/PV.9188), the tools proposed could also include dialogue with militant leaders, which should not be excluded as a possibility when trying to prevent terrorism. As Ms. Ero said, it is sometimes worth exploring. We are following efforts in the Niger with interest.

Let me conclude with some examples of how Norway will continue to support the G-5 Sahel, both during and after our term here on the Council. First, we will continue our efforts in the region to address food insecurity and the effects of climate change, including through collaboration between the Norwegian University of Life Sciences and the Niger's National Institute of Agricultural Research. Secondly, Norway will continue to address humanitarian needs in the region and work for humanitarian access. We have taken an active role in that regard as a co-host

of the upcoming conference in January on the Lake Chad region. Thirdly and finally, together with other peacebuilding processes in the region, we will continue to support the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali. We will focus on continuing to help women and young people take their rightful places in the follow-up process. In short, Norway will remain a consistent supporter of the G-5 Sahel now and in the years ahead.

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

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

We welcome the report of the Secretary-General (S/2022/838) and thank Assistant Secretary-General Pobe and Ambassador Eric Tiaré, Executive Secretary of the Group of Five for the Sahel (G-5 Sahel), for their comprehensive briefings and useful insights on the situation in the Sahel. We also welcome the participation in this meeting of Mr. Zakaria Ousmane Ramadan.

There have been several developments in the Sahel since the previous briefing to the Council six months ago (see S/PV.9147). The unstable political and security situation continues to affect the operations of the Joint Force of the G-5 Sahel. The developments include the withdrawal of the French force of Operation Barkhane from Mali; Mali's termination of its membership in the G-5 Sahel; on 30 September, the second military takeover in Burkina Faso in less than nine months; and increasing numbers of attacks by terrorist groups, leading to civilian and military casualties.

We express our condolences to all the victims of terrorist attacks and their families in the Sahel region and want to emphasize that the challenges faced by the Sahel are further aggravated by funding and logistical gaps that have undermined the effectiveness of the Joint Force. Despite those challenges, the A3 believes that the Joint Force can continue to be an important actor in addressing the security concerns in the Sahel. We note the determination of the member countries of the Joint Force and anticipate its imminent reconfiguration, while supporting continuing diplomatic efforts aimed at encouraging Mali to rejoin it. Beyond that, we also believe that funding and other logistical assistance from the international community and donor partners continues to be a necessary enabler.

We share the view that the Council, together with friendly countries and other stakeholders, should walk the talk by sparing no effort to rally support for regional mechanisms in a manner that ensures that the Force is well resourced in all aspects to enable it to achieve its mandate. Additionally, the creation of a United Nations support office to assist the Force will be essential to the realization of lasting peace in the Sahel. We recognize the difference that the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) can make through its convening, bridging and resource mobilization mandate to sustainably support the countries of the Sahel in the implementation of the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel and its Support Plan. The A3 welcomes the PBC's written advisory reflecting that effort, and we urge due consideration of its recommendations in order to address the broader challenges relating to national and regional peacebuilding.

In the light of current dynamics in the Sahel and the ongoing joint strategic assessment of the region, as well as the ongoing review of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), it is important to consider how MINUSMA's support for the activities of the G-5 Sahel Joint Force can be recalibrated. The A3 would like to highlight the following points, which we consider to be critical to enhancing the responsiveness of the Joint Force.

First, greater attention needs to be paid to addressing the political differences among the member countries of the Force. We underscore the need for convergence on democratic norms among the Force's member countries in order to restore cohesiveness and effectiveness and encourage their commitment to remaining engaged. We encourage the relevant member countries in the region to honour their respective transitional timelines aimed at restoring constitutional order. We believe that support from the international community for region-led efforts in tackling the political crisis facing the Joint Force, including Mali's return to its ranks, is critical. The need for enhancing cross-pillar coordination on governance, resilience and security in the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel is also important.

Secondly, the challenges facing the Joint Force, including technical and operational issues as well as inadequate infrastructure along supply routes, require greater attention. We encourage Member States in the region to enhance their cooperation and make good on their commitment to facilitating the timely issuance

of tax exemption letters, as well as to intensifying investment in infrastructure to address the storage capacity gaps facing the Force.

Thirdly, MINUSMA's continuing support to the six battalions of the Joint Force outside Mali, in accordance with the tripartite mechanism, is commendable. However, we note with concern the logistical and operational challenges facing MINUSMA, which have increased following the withdrawal of the French forces and other troop-contributing countries from the Mission. We believe that the anticipated report on the ongoing strategic review of MINUSMA, to be submitted to the Council on 13 January 2023, will emerge with realistic, robust and forward-looking recommendations that can enhance the Mission's responsiveness so as to enable it to better support the Joint Force.

Fourthly, it is clear that the Joint Force cannot adequately address the Sahelian crisis alone and without coordination and cooperation among other regional arrangements. It is our expectation that the ongoing joint strategic assessment of the Sahel will emerge with recommendations aimed at leveraging the best elements of the G-5 Sahel Joint Force, the Accra Initiative, the Nouakchott process and the Multinational Joint Task Force, as well as considering recommendations for a unified and restructured regional force. It is our expectation that those recommendations will include an element that addresses the dire funding and logistical challenges facing the Force. Another concern is the additional burden placed on the Force following the spillover effect of the crisis in Libya on the Sahel and the possible return of foreign terrorist fighters, as well as the proliferation of small arms and light weapons. We urge for coordinated action among the countries of the region, including on disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, in order to address this worrisome issue.

Fifthly, it is equally important for greater attention to be given to pre-emptive measures aimed at addressing the drivers of insecurity in the Sahel. The adoption of a whole-of-society approach to addressing the dire socioeconomic conditions in the region is paramount.

It is equally important to consider a multidimensional approach that combines security and development by implementing quick-impact community projects.

Addressing those challenges, including their aggravating impact on climate and security in the region, requires the creation of the right environment for women and young people to acquire the requisite skills to gain meaningful employment and participate in critical decision-making and political processes. The Peacebuilding Commission's initiatives targeting youth, women, agricultural self-employment and climate-related peace and development interventions are therefore essential. The involvement of the local communities in tackling the root causes of instability in the region is critical, since they suffer daily from the assaults of armed groups, the jolts of climate change and the pangs of poverty.

Lastly, we need to scale up humanitarian assistance, considering the increasing level of displacements emanating from the dire security situation. The over 34.6 million Sahelians in need of assistance in 2022, which is about 6 million more than in 2021, underpins the urgent need for donor partners to heed to the Secretary-General's call for an increase in funding support towards the realization of the \$3.8 billion humanitarian response plan required for the region.

In conclusion, the A3 believes that a multidimensional approach, including sustained support for the Joint Force, is indispensable in tackling the Sahelian crisis. While welcoming bilateral support from friendly countries and donor partners to the Force, the A3 believes that stronger political will by the Council in addressing the issue of predictable funding for the Force is equally critical if we want it to remain responsive to the security challenges in the Sahel.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers.

The meeting rose at noon.