



Remarks of the UN Special Coordinator for Development in the Sahel at the Senior Officials Meeting on the Humanitarian Situation in Central Sahel

Date: 27 January 2022

Venue: The event will be live streamed in English and French via www.webtv.un.org

Time: 8:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m. EST - 1:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m. GMT
2:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m. CET

Excellencies, dear partners, and dear friends of the Sahel,

It's an honor to join you today to **(a)** review progress in the implementation of the outcomes of the October 2020 Ministerial Roundtable Meeting; **(b)** renew our commitment for the mobilization of policy and financial support for our response, and **(c)** galvanize political support for principled humanitarian action - based on the recommendations of each country review process.

Let me first plug myself into the Sahel *zeitgeist*, *l'air du temps*, *l'esprit du moment*.

In statistics, there is what is called "*the law of series*", *i.e. the strong likelihood of some recurring events to be contagious and repetitive, in similar or quasi similar contexts*. Some 16 months after our last meeting, the political and security landscape in the Sahel is experiencing some exponential changes; with an increasing take over by military of the top public executive senior governance in the region. Not that I would infer that this is a nascent "*law of series*", but this certainly challenges us to boldly review and coldly assess our collective algorithm of interventions in the Sahel, including what we call stabilization in the context of instability and unpredictability, as well as the current geopolitics in the Sahel.

Without pre-judging the outcomes of such an analysis, it is clear to me that we must, together, address the phenomenon of "*elite capture of governance*" in the region, combined with our not so sturdy collective investment in tackling the root-causes of poverty and exclusion, including the weak structural transformations & low value addition of the Sahelian economies, which manifest in greater inequalities, stressed social contracts, forced migrations, exponential displacements, a mounting debt wall, and growing ungoverned spaces, especially in the border areas.

The humanitarian situation in the Sahel is but a manifestation of those structural deficiencies. They cannot be decoupled.



The increasingly dire humanitarian situation that we gather to address every year, is frustratingly surrealistic, to all stakeholders in the Sahel, to us partners, to governments and mostly to the Sahelian people. Not only it is chronically unfunded; with on average only about 23% of the expressed humanitarian needs, but this cannot be a sustainable *modus operandi*. Humanitarian solutions cannot be an adequate substitute for sustainable response to development deficits or governance shortcomings. But they remain a critical imperative. Let me take this occasion to recommend that where & when political sanctions are to be implemented, we ensure that there is a *humanitarian clause*, which would re-affirm the imperative & accountability to safeguard the humanitarian needs of the affected populations & the firm commitment to not compromise the criticality of saving lives.

Dear friends of the Sahel,

The Sahel has all the potential & opportunities to get out of the grooves. The region is not deprived of natural resources. And it has a vital force, its youth, which can be a powerful vector in driving development. Hence with the right inclusive/accountable/transparent governance, which has to shift from *elite capture* to stronger *people's agency*, with a collective commitment to invest – at-scale and long-term – in structural economic transformation, with governments' comfortable fiscal space not strangled by unsustainable debt & growing illicit financial outflows, with a religious discipline to implement human rights due diligence policies and international humanitarian laws, the despairing picture we are seeing at present, will soon be put in the museum of history.

This new narrative of the Sahel is what the younger generations in the Sahel are calling for. I have heard them speak. We have all heard them speak. They want to foster Hope. Not to be trapped in Despair. And they are determined, with confidence, to pursue that journey. They have innovative solutions at hand; they are calling on us to accompany them.

For us, gathering here today, this would mean strategic, multi-year and well-coordinated planning and funding. Although there are some attempts at country levels, there is currently no coordination of “stakeholders “around the Nexus in Central Sahel. And when I say “stakeholders”, I mean not only “donors” or the international community, but I would put national governments, communities, and regional structures, at the center of coordination. To be successful a real NEXUS approach must involve all stakeholders of the “aid “ecosystem as well as national and regional actors; with a premium to be put on Youth's agency.

The Security Council mandated United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel – UNISS, which is being re-invigorated, and which focuses on the 3 critical pillars of Governance, Resilience & Security, has the ambition to provide & inspire such a wider coordination platform. I invite us all to use it, fully.



Let me conclude by saying that in the Sahel, the Nexus Culture is slowly jelling. Even beyond what we understand as the Humanitarian-Development-Peace nexus, I am seeing greater collaboration in areas at the heart of the Nexus, such as prevention, resilience, governance, social cohesion, and responses to the Covid 19 pandemics. We will need to irreversibly transform & enlarge this emerging culture into standard praxis.

As we also need to address what I would call the *Time Horizons -Nexus*, I am personally inviting all actors to collectively work on "*predictive analytics* ", an initiative that the United Nations has recently launched in the Sahel; as for me, we cannot work on short term issues without having an anticipatory eye on the longer term; and we cannot address structural long-term issues without paying attention to the pressing needs of the present moment. We have to do *development with a sense of urgency*; or in other word we must now practice "*development emergency*", with no time horizons-dichotomy and with a fusional proximity of all actors & stakeholders operating in and on the Sahel.