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THE AFRICAN UNION STRATEGY FOR THE SAHEL REGION

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

I. GOVERNANCE

1.1. Introduction

1.2. Priority areas

- 1.2.1. Consolidation of the rule of law and the strengthening of democratic institutions
- 1.2.2. Administrative decentralisation and sharing of successful experiences
- 1.2.3. Fight against corruption and the promotion of international standards of good management
- 1.2.4. Promotion of human rights and humanitarian action
- 1.2.5. Support to the dialogue and reconciliation processes
- 1.2.6. Support for the electoral processes in the region
- 1.2.7. Promotion of peace and national cohesion through religious and traditional leaders
- 1.2.8. Conflict management and integration of nomadic communities

II. SECURITY

2.1. Introduction

2.2. Priority areas

- 2.2.1. Promotion of regional cooperation in the area of security
- 2.2.2. Participation in reflections for the deepening of the Nouakchott Process
- 2.2.3. Participation in the DDR programmes of armed groups of Northern Mali
- 2.2.4. Participation in the SSR programmes in Mali and the Sahel
- 2.2.5. Cooperation with partners in the field of security

III. DEVELOPMENT

3.1. Introduction

3.2. Priority areas

- 3.2.1. Regional collaboration on infrastructural and development projects
- 3.2.2. Socio-economic integration of the youth and women
- 3.2.3. Agricultural and pastoral development and support to the resilience of populations

ASSUMPTIONS OF RISKS AND MITIGATION STRATEGIES

INTRODUCTION

1. There are several approaches to define the geographical and geostrategic contours of what constitutes the Sahel, which sometimes lends to confusion. For the purposes of the engagement of the African Union (AU) in the region, it is fitting to define the zone in two ways. On the one hand, the geographical area of the Sahelo-Saharan zone comprises all the countries located on the Sahelian strip separating North and Sub-Saharan Africa. This includes Algeria, Burkina Faso, Chad, Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and the Sudan. There are, on the other hand, countries that are outside this area but who deserve, all the same, special attention, including Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Nigeria and Senegal.

2. The present *Strategy of the African Union for the Sahel Region* is centred on three main pillars: (i) governance; (ii) security; and (iii) development. These three areas, especially the first two, are issues on which the AU has a clear comparative advantage, as per its continental mandate, its experience in the subject matters and its familiarity with the issues at hand.

3. The African Union Mission for Mali and the Sahel (MISAHEL) is the structure of the AU responsible for the effective implementation of this strategy. In discharging this responsibility, MISAHEL will strive to work in close collaboration and, where necessary, coordination with other relevant structures of the AU both within the region and beyond. These structures include especially the African Centre for the Study and Research on Terrorism (ACSRT, Algiers), the AU Scientific Technical and Research Commission (AU-STRC, Abuja), the Office of the African Union for the Promotion of Agricultural Research and the Development of Semi-Arid Areas of Africa (SAFGRAD, Ouagadougou), the Centre for Language and Historical Studies through Oral Tradition (CELTHO, Niamey), the African Academy of Languages (ACALAN, Bamako), the liaison offices of the AU in Chad (N'Djamena) and Libya (Tripoli), the Inter-African Bureau for Animal Resources (IBAR, Nairobi), the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD, Johannesburg), and the Committee of Intelligence and Security Services of Africa (CISSA, Addis Ababa). It will collaborate with other regional structures that were not necessarily initiated by the AU, like the Capacity of the Northern Region (NARC), the Fusion and Liaison Unit (UFL), the Committee of the Joint Operational Command (CEMOC), and other structures and programmes of the AU or countries of the region in the Sahel and beyond.

4. Based on the principles of complementarity and comparative advantage, as well as African ownership, the effective implementation of this strategy will require also the assistance and collaboration of the Regional Economic Communities (RECs), the

Regional Mechanisms in the Sahel and of African financial institutions, particularly the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), the Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD), the African Development Bank (AfDB), the Interstate Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS), and any other relevant organisation or regional mechanism, including the African private sector, research centres and academic institutions.

5. Coordination with these institutions, particularly the RECs, is crucial for the success of this Strategy, in view of the fact that many of the RECs have projects that should be supported by the Strategy and/or can be supplementary to some of the projects identified in the Strategy. This coordination is also important as a measure to avoid unnecessary duplication between the continental body and regional organisations that are considered as its building blocks and pillars.

6. In the pages that follow, each of the aforementioned three pillars of the Strategy is elaborated, beginning with a brief introductory note. A number of concrete projects to be achieved under each area are identified. A Communication Strategy and an Annual Plan of Action complement this Strategy. These two documents are dynamic, as they are to be updated according to the realities on the ground. In the meantime, however, it is worth underlying three key points in relation to the present Strategy and to MISAHHEL, namely the overall framework of the Strategy, its background and that of MISAHHEL, and the collaboration mechanisms.

The overall framework

7. This Strategy falls within the framework of the implementation of aspects of a number of regional instruments in Africa, particularly at the level of the AU; all under the overall umbrella of the Constitutive Act of the AU and the general AU strategy that constitutes the Agenda 2063. On governance issues, it is worth recalling the following instruments: the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (1981), the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1990), the Lomé Declaration on Unconstitutional Changes of Government (July 2000), the Protocol relating to the establishment of the Peace and Security Council (PSC, 2002), the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (2003), the African Union Convention on the Prevention and Fight Against Corruption (2003), the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM, 2002), the African Charter on democracy, Elections and Governance (2007), the Convention for the Protection of and Assistance to Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (2009), as well as the African Charter on the Values and Principles of the Public Service and Administration (2011).

8. With regard to security issues, reference is made to the Protocol relating to the establishment of the PSC and the overall structures of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), the OAU Convention on the Fight Against Mercenarism in Africa

(1977), the OAU Convention on the Prevention and Fight against Terrorism (1999), the Plan of Action of the AU on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism in Africa (2002), the Protocol (2004) to the 1999 OAU Convention on the Prevention and Fight against Terrorism, the Common African Defence and Security Policy (2004), the Pact of Non-Aggression and Common Defence (2005), the AU Decision to Combat the Payment of Ransom to Terrorist Groups to obtain the release of hostages (2009), and the Pelindaba Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons in Africa.

9. With regard to the development component, the following key instruments and projects are recalled: the Lagos Plan of Action (1980), the final Act of Lagos (1980), the Priority Programme for Economic Recovery in Africa (1986-1990), the African Alternative Framework to Structural Adjustment Programmes (1989), the Arusha African Charter for Popular Participation in Development and Transformation (1990), the Abuja Treaty (1991), the Cairo Agenda (1994), the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD 2001-02), the AU Policy Framework on Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development (PCRD, 2006) and the AU-SAFGRAD's Strategic Plan of Action (2014-2017) for the strengthening of rural livelihoods in semi-arid zones of Africa. In addition to these instruments, it should be noted that the AU adopted, in 2012, the African Solidarity Initiative (ASI), which aims to mobilise, within the continent, the commitments and contributions of any nature, in human and financial resources, contributing to the strengthening of local capacities, in order to support the national efforts of reconstruction and development in the various African countries.

Brief background of the Strategy

10. The involvement of the AU in the Sahel region dates back to several years. The Libyan crisis of 2011 and its regional ramifications increased the scope of that engagement and the attention given by the continental organisation to the Sahel-Saharan region. In anticipation of the potential regional ramifications of this crisis, the AU Commission (AUC) and the United Nations (UN) Secretariat undertook a joint multidisciplinary mission in the Sahel region from 7 to 23 December 2011. The purpose of this mission was to assess the impact of the Libyan crisis on the countries of the region. Following this mission, the two organisations jointly organised, in Addis Ababa, on 14 and 15 March 2012, a meeting of experts on the situation in the Sahel region. This meeting made wide-ranging recommendations on how best the AU and the UN, working with the countries of the region and international partners, could assist in addressing the challenges at hand. The United Nations drew largely on these recommendations to prepare the 'United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel'.

11. At its 314th meeting, held at ministerial level in Bamako on 20 March 2012, the Peace and Security Council (PSC) of the AU endorsed the conclusions of this joint AU-UN experts meeting. It requested the AU Commission, working closely with the UN and in consultation with other stakeholders, including relevant RECs and partners, to take all

the steps necessary for the follow-up and implementation of these recommendations. In this respect, the PSC requested the AUC to enhance its presence on the ground through the existing AU offices in the region.

12. The follow-up and implementation of these recommendations were delayed by the 22 March 2012 military coup in Mali, which shifted the focus to the resolution of the institutional crisis in Bamako and other related issues. The intensification of the crisis in the north of Mali, and the total occupation of this region by armed terrorist groups further delayed this process. In the meantime, the African-led International Support Mission for Mali (AFISMA), a military operation with a significant civilian component, was deployed in the country. On 24 October 2012, the PSC adopted the Strategic Concept for the Resolution of the Crises in Mali, which had been prepared by the AUC, in collaboration with ECOWAS and other partners. This document fed into the Concept of Operations of AFISMA, particularly in terms of the definition of its desired outcomes. Beyond the management of the crises of the time, this strategic document advocated for actions in the medium and long terms in Mali and in the Sahel, with a view to acting against the root causes of the recurring insecurity in the region. Indeed, this document constitutes an important reference for the present Strategy, in addition to the recommendations of the aforementioned joint experts meeting of March 2012.

13. As per UN Security Council Resolution 2100 (2013) of 25 April 2013, AFISMA was transformed into a United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) on 1st July 2013 after nearly six months of dedicated service by these African troops and civilian functionaries. Following this transition, the Chairperson of the AUC decided to establish, as from August 2013, the African Union Mission for Mali and the Sahel (MISAHEL), with its headquarters in Bamako and extensions within other AU structures in the region. The idea underpinning the establishment of MISAHEL is to strengthen AU's presence in Mali and in the Sahel region. The AUC then tasked MISAHEL to refine the strategy of the AU on the Sahel and to coordinate its implementation. The present Strategy is therefore the result of a long process of internal consultations and with regional and international partners, including African experts and researchers.

14. In establishing the MISAHEL, the AU is well aware not only of its responsibilities, but also of its comparative advantages in certain areas where it can make a real contribution in the Sahel region. Indeed, by its continental nature, the AU is the organisation that can very legitimately provide an overall umbrella for the regional initiatives in the Sahel, which transcends almost three geographical regions of the continent and is thus situated beyond the space of any regional mechanism. The AU also has a great capacity for resource mobilisation, be it intellectual, technical or financial, both within the continent and beyond.

Collaboration with regional and international partners

15. In the development and implementation of the present Strategy, the AU is aware of the fact that national strategies and efforts must be given priority and that other efforts and strategies should support, as much as possible, these national efforts. In fact, the various countries of the region have adopted economic development projects as well as initiatives in administrative decentralization in order to meet the needs of their populations. However, these projects are often faced with the lack of adequate resources for their implementation, even though corruption might have had a negative impact on some of these projects. A second observation is that no country in the region is capable, on its own, to face the whole gamut of the challenges confronting it. There is therefore need for these countries to harmonise their strategies and mutualise their efforts for greater efficiency. It is important then to create and/or strengthen the political will and the spirit of cooperation between the countries of the region and the AU stands ready to contribute, in close collaboration with the relevant regional organisations, to stimulate and/or strengthen this willingness and of that spirit.

16. Finally, it should be recognised that issues of the Sahel zone do not concern Africa only, for some of the threats identified, as the insecurity and terrorism, go beyond the region and the continent. It is in this context that the AU welcomes the interest in the region and the commitment of the United Nations, the European Union (EU), and other international actors. But it is only through mechanisms of, and a real desire for, coordination between these different actors that the above objectives could be achieved. Thus, the AU, through this Strategy, aims to federate all these good wills to identify synergies, avoid unnecessary duplication and promote an action-oriented approach of the various initiatives for this region.

I. GOVERNANCE

1. Introduction

17. Good political governance is based on a system in which the populations play a primary role in the choice of their leaders and their representatives, as well as in the overall management of their country or community. With regard to good economic governance, it implies a sound management of public resources of the country or of the community and their equitable distribution between the different populations and regions of the country, while allowing citizens to be able to check and control the use of these resources, either directly or through their duly elected representatives. In addition, it is generally accepted today that the periodic holding of competitive and credible elections, and the effective promotion of a culture of respect for human rights and freedom of expression, are other essential elements of good governance.

18. However, despite the commendable efforts made by the countries of the Sahel region, and the African countries in general, the persistent shortcomings in the implementation of these principles are responsible for serious crises, and even of situations of under-development. Thus, the actions of the AU in the area of governance in the Sahel, through the MISAHHEL and in collaboration with the countries of the region, the various regional (REC) and international partners, can be articulated around the following key priority areas:

2. Priority areas

a) The consolidation of the rule of law and the strengthening of democratic institutions

19. *Lack of respect for principles of good governance and the rule of law and the manipulation of constitutional provisions relating to power alternation play an important role in the occurrence of political crises in the Sahel region and on the continent as a whole. To contribute to the efforts aimed at overcoming these challenges, the following actions are envisaged:*

- (i) Undertake initiatives and support programmes aimed at popularising, in the countries of the Sahel, the different regional and international instruments in the field of good governance and respect for the rule of law. This action can be carried out through workshops, experience-sharing seminars and communication materials such as leaflets, compilation of texts, the participation of MISAHHEL experts in media and public discussions in the countries of the Sahel, audio-visual publicity spots, and the cooperation agreements with universities, research institutes and any other body having projects that could support this initiative.
- (ii) Ensure close monitoring of political developments in the countries of the region and undertake good offices and structural conflict prevention initiatives.
- (iii) Support civil society organisations, including women's associations, parliamentarians, political parties and the media professionals in the region with a view to enabling them to play their role for the effective implementation of these instruments in their respective fields of action.

b) Administrative decentralization and sharing of successful experiences in this area

20. *The administrative decentralization is recognised as an effective way to bring governance and development initiatives and projects closer to local populations, particularly if it is effectively implemented, not only in terms of the devolution of authority, but also through the provision of the necessary resources that would enable local authorities to undertake concrete development projects. The following measures are envisaged to concretise AU action in this domain:*

- (i) Organise experience-sharing conferences with the participation of countries in Africa and elsewhere who have had successful experiences in the field of decentralisation within the strict observance and respect of the principle of national unity.
- (ii) Encourage and support the adoption and effective implementation of laws that reflect, in reality, the decentralisation and the involvement of local authorities and communities in the implementation of development projects concerning them, including the provision of the necessary financial and human resources.
- (iii) The provision of technical resources (experts) to the governments of the region in support to their efforts aimed at devising the best strategies for the implementation of effective decentralisation.

c) Fight against corruption and the promotion of international standards of good public finance management

21. *Corruption is a scourge that affects, very negatively, the socio-economic development projects of many African countries, notwithstanding the wealth of these countries. To contribute to the fight against this scourge, the following measures will be undertaken:*

- (i) Conduct awareness raising actions, directed at governments and ordinary citizens, on the various regional and international instruments designed to fight against corruption;
- (ii) Organise training workshops for the benefit of public civil servants in order to strengthen their capacities in the good management of public resources and to remind them of the ethics of good management;
- (iii) Promote good practices in the management of public finances by encouraging the countries of the Sahel to adopt international standards of good management of public resources;

- (iv) Organize training workshops for political parties, parliamentarians, media professionals and civil society organisations in order to equip them with skills that would enable them to better control government action.
- (v) Support and empower national and regional anti-corruption structures to make them more efficient.
- (vi) Associate and cooperate more closely with African CSOs working in this field, equip them so that they may develop a credible African expertise in the field of fight against corruption.

d) Promotion of human rights and humanitarian action

22. *To promote a culture of respect for human rights and curb injustices, inequalities and the perceptions of marginalisation, the following actions are envisaged:*

- (i) Contribute to the education and awareness-raising actions about regional and international instruments relating to human rights and humanitarian law;
- (ii) Ensure a constant monitoring of the human rights situation in the region, through permanent or occasional human rights observers and make recommendations for the adoption of preventive and corrective measures in this regard;
- (iii) Encourage the establishment of institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights in accordance with the Paris Principles of 1991;
- (iv) Encourage the countries of the region to adopt concrete measures ensuring the equitable inclusion of different segments of society in the different programmes of government action;
- (v) Help mobilise funds for humanitarian action, in support to needy populations in the region, including refugees and internally displaced persons.

e) Support for the dialogue and reconciliation processes, including transitional justice

23. *The AU proposes to continue its engagement in the dialogue and reconciliation processes, both in Mali and at the regional level, through the following actions:*

- (i) Accompany the Malian authorities in the effective implementation of the 18 June 2013 Ouagadougou Agreement in carrying out the tasks assigned to the AU in this Agreement, including in the facilitation of inclusive talks and the implementation of their outcomes;
- (ii) Accompany the Malian authorities in the process of dialogue and national reconciliation;
- (iii) Mobilize funds to support the field actions of institutions in charge of the dialogue and reconciliation processes in Mali, particularly in relation to the development of their programmes of activities, the conduct of their hearing missions to listen to populations across the country, and other projects identified with the competent authorities;
- (iv) Accompany the authorities of other countries of the Sahel, where applicable, in their dialogue and national reconciliation processes;
- (v) Promote the culture of peace with and through the media by organising, in the region, training workshops for media professionals, civil society organisations and the youth so that they can play a positive role in promoting the values of dialogue and tolerance;
- (vi) Support the Network of Journalists for Peace and Security in Africa (NetPeace) and the Communication Unit of the UFL, and make them instruments of information-sharing and actors of dialogue and reconciliation in the Sahel;
- (vii) Support women's associations of the region so that they can play an important role in the process of dialogue and reconciliation in the Sahel.

f) Electoral processes in the region

24. *The recurrence of election-related conflicts in the region - as elsewhere on the continent - indicates the long road that still lies ahead and efforts needed to overcome this situation. To contribute to these efforts, the AU plans to undertake the following actions:*

- (i) Promote, with governments and political parties, the various regional instruments in the field of good governance and the organisation of transparent and credible elections;
- (ii) Undertake reflection and analytical works on the reform of electoral laws, where necessary, and the improvement of the electoral processes in the region;

- (iii) Facilitate experience-sharing exchanges between the different election management bodies (EMBs) in the countries of the region and elsewhere;
- (iv) Give appropriate support to EMBs during the electoral processes, according to their needs and the means of the AU;
- (v) Contribute to the training of electoral officials and representatives of political parties during election periods;
- (vi) Contribute to the training of journalists specialised on electoral matters;
- (vii) Contribute to the mobilisation of funds for electoral processes in the different countries of the region.

g) Promotion of peace and national cohesion through religious and traditional leaders

25. *Religious and traditional leaders play an important socio-political role in the region. Thus, the African Charter for the Cultural Renaissance stressed that ‘elders and traditional leaders are important cultural actors. Their role and importance deserve an official recognition through their integration in the modern mechanisms of conflict resolution and in the systems of intercultural dialogue.’ However, malicious individuals try to divert the noble messages of religions and instrumentalise them for criminal and malicious actions, while others preach religious intolerance. To reverse this trend, the following measures are envisaged:*

- (i) Facilitate regular exchanges between and with religious and traditional leaders around values of tolerance and strategies to better convey these messages through the media, to the young people and in places of worship;
- (ii) Strengthen the position of religious and traditional leaders to enable them to better play their role of actors of peace, and preachers of common values and messages of tolerance and harmonious cohabitation;
- (iii) Support civil society organisations and youth associations working in the field of promotion of religious tolerance and sensitisation of young people on the consequences of intolerance and religious extremism;
- (iv) Promoting inter-faith dialogue using the existing cultural mechanisms in the Sahel region to avoid the stigma and violence against other beliefs.

(h) Conflict management and integration of nomadic communities

26. *The main nomadic populations in the Sahel region are the Tuareg (Algeria, Burkina Faso, Libya, Mali and Niger), the Toubus (Chad, Libya and Niger) and, to a lesser degree, the Fulani or Peuls. The integration of these populations in some countries of the region is still a challenge. For its contribution to overcome this challenge, the AU is considering the following measures:*

- (i) Undertake reflection works on innovative projects for the adaptation of public and social services to the lifestyles of nomadic communities, such as the idea of mobile schools and clinics;
- (ii) Organise meetings for experience-sharing between the different countries of the region and other countries of the continent and elsewhere who have had to manage populations with similar modes of life;
- (iii) Promote a regional dialogue between the countries of the Sahel on the appropriate measures to facilitate the cross-border movement of nomadic populations and the good management of their national identity;
- (iv) Encourage the promotion of languages and cultural symbols of the nomadic populations, within a framework of national harmony, in order to enhance their integration into the national community;
- (v) Mobilise funds to support governments and the people to develop projects that could benefit nomadic populations, such as pasture points for their livestock.
- (vi) Support measures to combat cattle wrestling and promote the harmonious cohabitation between nomads and sedentary populations.

II. SECURITY

1. Introduction

27. In the framework of the efforts aimed at resolving the security crises in the Sahel, a number of initiatives have been taken in view of fighting terrorism and transnational organised crime. Since the Libyan crisis in 2011 and the outbreak of the conflict in northern Mali in January 2012, the AU, in coordination with the relevant RECs and some of its specialised agencies, such as the Committee of Intelligence and Security Services of Africa (CISSA) and the African Centre for the Study and Research on Terrorism (ACSRT), has intensified the actions through the existing structures. For example, the AU has undertaken assessment missions in the most affected countries (Chad, Libya, Mali, Mauritania and Niger) and organised consultations with the countries concerned to

promote regional cooperation in the realm of security. The 'Core countries' have also put in place joint operational structures for the fight against terrorism and cross-border organised crime, including the CEMOC and the UFL.

28. In spite of these efforts, insecurity persists in the Sahel with, *inter alia*, the establishment in the region of terrorist groups and the development of the criminal economy, including the illicit traffic of all kinds, large-scale banditry and hostage-taking. The collusion between terrorism and drug trafficking has worsened the climate of insecurity and now constitutes the major threat in the region. Indeed, drug trafficking, including cannabis and cocaine, has provided terrorist groups with new sources of financing which, in addition to the ransoms collected in hostage-taking operations, have increased their capacity of nuisance and expanded their operational area towards West and East Africa. These multifaceted threats have taken a regional and international dimension aggravated by the weakness of border control exercised by the States of the Sahel-Saharan sub-region and their lack of operational and strategic capabilities. This situation is made worse by the inefficiency and lack of coordination of the various regional initiatives.

29. Thus, it is necessary to use the existing instruments of the AU to provide the Sahel region with appropriate measures to strengthen the security in the region. The following priority areas are thus identified to enable the implementation of specific and innovative programmes of coordination and capacity-building in the field of security.

2. Priority areas:

a) Promotion of regional security cooperation through the Nouakchott Process

30. *The Nouakchott Process was launched on 17 March 2013, date of its first meeting in the Mauritanian capital. Periodically bringing together the Heads of the intelligence and services and competent ministers of the Sahel region, its main objective is the strengthening of regional security cooperation, exchange of information for an effective fight against terrorism, as well as the operationalisation of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) in the Sahel-Saharan region. The first ministerial meeting on the strengthening of regional cooperation and the operationalisation of the APSA, held in Nouakchott on 17 March 2013, also reaffirmed the need to strengthen border security. In addition, the joint ACSRT, CISSA and UFL mission in Libya in the period from 3 May to 5 September 2013, aimed at strengthening the role of the States concerned, including Libya, in the implementation of specific measures of border security. In addition to the need to continue these periodic consultations, the AU will contribute to this vast undertaking through the following actions:*

- (i) Ensure information-sharing, monitoring and implementation of the recommendations of the Nouakchott Process, as well as the appropriation of this Strategy by the countries of the region through the convening of periodic meetings in the framework of the Nouakchott Process;
- (ii) Promote confidence-building measures between the countries of the region and contribute to the strengthening of regional cooperation in the areas of information-sharing, security and the fight against terrorism and other forms of trans-border organised crime;
- (iii) Continue the technical assessment and sensitisation missions in the countries concerned and with AU structures, including liaison offices, to discuss the modalities for the constitution of mixed units and joint patrols with a precise and consensual timetable for implementation;
- (iv) Facilitate the operationalisation and the strengthening of regional cooperation structures, such as the CEMOC and the UFL, by deploying experts to evaluate the structures, missions and the operational procedures of these structures and to propose harmonised solutions.
- (v) Evaluate the structures and measures established to combat the circulation of weapons in the Sahel, including the legal framework, in order to propose an harmonised plan of action;
- (vi) Facilitate the strengthening of the capacities of national services fighting against narcotics, by deploying experts and by providing them with modern research, identification and control equipment;
- (vii) Engage in a partnership with relevant RECs and Regional Mechanisms, as well as the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), for a better appreciation of the legal framework, and the strengthening of regional cooperation and capacity building;
- (viii) Contribute to the preparation of a comprehensive list of cross-points of drug cartels and the identification of modalities of their equipment through the use of modern detection and control equipment.

b) Reflections on the deepening of the Nouakchott process

31. *Given the particularity of the Sahel-Saharan zone, it is appropriate to consider to what extent the APSA could be applied to meet the security challenges of the region. In this perspective, the AU could:*

- (i) Participate in the development of a generic Concept of Operation and a legal framework for the establishment of mixed units for border patrols and the protection of refugee camps, drawing on the successful experiences in the region;
- (ii) Contribute to the implementation of the ECOWAS Strategy to fight against terrorism, to the effective operationalisation and the proper functioning of the early warning systems of the ECOWAS (ECOWARN) and ECCAS (MARAC), as well as those developed by ACSRT and UFL in order to fight against terrorism and transnational criminality, while constituting a good operational partner of the Continental Early Warning System (CEWS) of the AU;
- (iii) Participate in the reflection on the African Capacity for Immediate Response to Crisis (ACIRC) for it to incorporate the specific response capabilities to threats of the Sahel region, in line with the relevant AU decisions on ACIRC and the African Standby Force (ASF).

c) Support programmes for Disarmament, Demobilization and Socio-economic Reintegration (DDR) of armed groups of Northern Mali

32. *The DDR process constitutes one of the important steps of normalisation of the situation in Mali and the Sahel. It is rightly identified as such in article 21 of the Ouagadougou Agreement of 18 June 2013. To contribute to this, the MISAHEL will undertake the following actions:*

- (i) Deploy experts/military observers, in collaboration with the MINUSMA, to support initiatives for the cantonment and the disarmament of armed groups in Northern Mali;
- (ii) Facilitate the implementation of a programme of depollution of secure zones in northern Mali and in the Sahel in general;
- (iii) Assist in the preparation and follow-up on the implementation of DDR programmes.

(d) Participation in Security Sector Reform (SSR) programmes in the Sahel region

33. *The SSR is essential in a post-conflict country, such as Mali; but it is also necessary for many other countries of the region, even some of those that did not go through a major crisis. The Sahel region is all the more concerned by this process that it faces security challenges and problems of development that require suitable responses*

from security services. There is no doubt that the countries of the region have the primary responsibility in this regard; however, but the AU could undertake the following actions:

- (i) Ensure the dissemination of the AU policy on the SSR and assist in its implementation in the countries of the Sahel, while also contributing to the reflection work on the SSR;
- (ii) Support programmes for the computerised registration of the defence and security personnel in the countries of the region that express a need, by providing funding and assisting them in preparing biometric identity cards;
- (iii) Deploy SSR experts in the countries that express the need;
- (iv) Share the experiences of African countries that have undergone or implemented a successful SSR programme;
- (v) Raise awareness on good military governance, a factor of stability and good civil-military relations, taking into account the local realities and the principles of international humanitarian law;
- (vi) Raise awareness on the role of civilian protection and assist in the creation of units and coordination centres for the management of natural disasters;
- (vii) Assist in the creation of units and centres for early warning and coordination for the management of natural disasters, such as the locusts, floods and droughts.

(e) Cooperation with partners in the field of security

34. *To achieve its objectives, the AU will ensure that its actions support the principle of African ownership of the security problems in the Sahel and encourage cooperation with research centres and multilateral partners. In this context and based on the achievements so far, the AU could:*

- (i) Facilitate the integration of modules on the Sahel in the training and research programmes of a number of existing training institutions;
- (ii) Request specialised agencies and international organisations to make available African experts in the areas of the fight against terrorism, DDR, SSR and the fight against trafficking of all kinds;

- (iii) Contribute to the national efforts aimed at ensuring the involvement of civil society organisations and the strengthening of the public-private partnership in the management of security issues.

III. DEVELOPMENT

1. Introduction

35. There is a close link between stability and development; the presence of one reinforcing the other and his absence causing the fragility of the other. The factors that affect development prospects in the region are many, ranging from human factors, such as the questions of poor governance (corruption, bad economic and financial policies), natural factors, such as the degradation of the environment caused by climate change and other natural disasters such as droughts and floods.

36. Therefore, in addition to other initiatives to assist the countries of the region in their development projects, cited in the general introduction of the present Strategy, one concept that attempts to concretely draw the link between security and development is the programme of 'Civic Service for Development Action' (SCAD). This programme proposes to offer young volunteers a civic and professional training, provided by civilian trainers, but often in a military setting. At the end of their training, focused on practical disciplines such as carpentry, electricity, plumbing and building, the acquired skills are put to the benefit of the development of their country, through the integration of the graduates in the public service or in the private sector. To date, at least 14 African countries (Benin, Botswana, Burundi, Central African Republic, Chad, Cote d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Guinea, Madagascar, Niger, South Africa, Togo, Tunisia and Zambia) have developed, or are in the process of putting in place a programme of SCAD or a similar programme.

37. The AU policy on Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development (PCRD) is another initiative. These different initiatives can be exploited to assist the countries of the Sahel in their development projects, through the following main projects:

- a) Support the collaboration between the countries of the region on infrastructural and development projects**

38. *Determined by geography and the social-economic linkages between their populations, the countries of the Sahel have everything to gain by combining their efforts to undertake common infrastructural and development projects. To translate this observation into reality, the AU is considering the following measures:*

- (i) Make an inventory of development projects in the region and facilitate their implementation;
- (ii) Undertake reflection works on the opportunities for regional cooperation in the area of development of common infrastructure projects and prepare a report on the status of cooperation in the region, including in the humanitarian action;
- (iii) Conduct consultations with the countries of the region to make them understand the opportunities that are available to them for regional cooperation and encourage them to take advantage in setting up common infrastructural projects;
- (iv) Help the countries of the region in the mobilisation of funds for feasibility studies and the implementation of some of these joint projects.

(b) Socio-economic integration of youth and women

39. *Women and young people represent the majority of the people of the Sahel. Having regard to the development needs of the current era, and the intellectual capacity of these young people and women, they are an important factor for the development of their respective countries and of the region. Conversely, a high rate of unemployment and of socio-economic exclusion of youth and women constitutes a time bomb and a situation that facilitates the recruitment of youth by criminal groups, warlords and terrorist movements. Of course, women constituting at least 50% of the African population, excluding them from development projects would mean 'a spacecraft working with less than half of its capacity'. Thus, to optimise the contribution of young people and of women for development, the following actions are envisaged:*

- (i) Contribute to the reflection and analytical works on the opportunities for effective socio-economic integration of youth and women in the countries of the Sahel;
- (ii) Promote the programmes of 'Civic Service for Development Action' (SCAD) in the countries of the region and help to mobilise the necessary funds for them, including the funding of vocational schools, and the development of handicrafts;
- (iii) Encourage and promote the adoption of projects of 'national service' for young people, which entail the posting of young graduates in regions other than their original one to undertake a service compatible with their training, as a paid internship, for periods ranging from six months to two years.

(c) Agricultural and Pastoral Development and support to the resilience of populations

40. *In Africa in general and in the Sahel region in particular, the problem of the environment constitutes a serious problem, particularly as regards the imbalance between natural resources, on the one hand, and the ever-growing needs of populations, on the other hand. This unbalanced situation presents several effects, which constitute real development challenges for the Sahel countries. To help overcome these challenges, the AU proposes to carry out, among others, the following actions:*

- (i) Contribute to the adoption and the implementation of programmes and projects that could accelerate the economic growth through the development of the agricultural sector in order to eliminate or, at least to reduce hunger, poverty and improve food nutritional security in the Sahel region, including the implementation of the Comprehensive African Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) of NEPAD;
- (ii) Contribute to the effective implementation of the Strategic Plan of the AU-SAFGRAD (2014-2017) for the strengthening of rural livelihoods in semi-arid areas of Africa, in particular as regards the strengthening of policies, institutions and strategies conducive to the resilience of rural livelihoods, and the development of Africa's capacity in research, dissemination of technologies and knowledge management for the strengthening of the resilience of rural livelihoods in the Sahel region;
- (iii) Support national and regional efforts for the preservation and sustainable management of Sahelian ecosystems, in particular through the maintenance of a balance in the interaction between human activities and the natural resources available while being mindful of nature, the environment and the socio-economic interests and cultural rights of the local populations, taking into account, among others, the Revised African Convention on the Conservation of Nature and Natural resources (or the Maputo Convention) of July 2003 ;
- (iv) Contribute to the effective implementation of the 'Great Green Wall for the Sahara and the Sahel' initiative, adopted by the AU summit in January 2007 and which aims to combat the social, economic and environmental impacts of desertification in the Sahel region;
- (v) Carry out actions with a view to supporting the promotion and modernisation of livestock and combating the theft of cattle in the region.

ASSUMPTION OF RISKS AND STRATEGIES FOR MITIGATION

41. The effective implementation of this Sahel Strategy will depend on several factors and assumptions, including the following :

- (a) That the countries of the Sahel will continue to demonstrate a political will for cooperation with the AU/MISAHEL and other partners;
- (b) The absence of any major interruption in the process of stabilisation in Mali, and the absence of any major incidence or widespread instability elsewhere in the region;
- (c) That the countries of the Sahel do not prioritise bilateral cooperation at the expense of the regional/continental and multilateral assistance under the pretext of the sensitivity of the Security aspect of regional cooperation;
- (d) The overcoming of the challenges of interoperability between the security forces and the technical structures of different countries so as to facilitate the adoption of harmonized procedures;
- (e) A better coordination between the MISAHEL/AU and the various implementing partners identified in this Strategy;
- (f) The availability of the necessary financial resources from the funding sources identified in the Action Plan for each priority action and/or other sources and the absence of any last-minute withdrawal of donors committed.

42. In order to lessen or mitigate the aforementioned risks that could jeopardise the implementation of the actions identified above, it is necessary to:

- a) Adopt and strengthen measures of confidence, in continuing the consultations at all levels and ensuring the coordination between regional stakeholders;
- b) Ensure a high level of transparency in the design and implementation of all actions identified;
- c) Mobilize and ensure a sustained commitment on the part of the financial partners identified, and to ensure that there is diversity in this regard, while being proactive in anticipating the possibilities of disengagement of a given partner.