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**REPORT ON MALI AND THE SAHEL AND THE ACTIVITIES OF THE
AFRICAN UNION MISSION FOR MALI AND THE SAHEL**

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. The present Report gives an account of the major developments that took place in Mali and in the Sahel region in general at the political, security and humanitarian levels. It also reports on the efforts made by the African Union (AU), including through its Mission for Mali and the Sahel (MISAHEL) and presents briefly the document « Strategy of the African Union for the Sahel Region» attached as annex. The Reports concludes with recommendations on the way forward.

II. EVOLUTION OF THE POLITICAL AND SECURITY SITUATION IN MALI AND IN THE SAHEL

a) Political situation in Mali

2. Mali has henceforth emerged fully from the situation of breach of Constitutional legality in which it was plunged following the coup d'Etat of 22 March 2012. The successful organization of the Presidential and Legislative elections in 2013 made it possible to establish new institutions. Parallel to the process of consolidating the democratic institutions, the implementation of the Ouagadougou Agreement of 18 June 2013 is being pursued despite some challenges. On 26 April 2014, President Ibrahima Boubacar Keita appointed Mr. Modibo Keita, former Prime Minister, as the High Representative to the Inclusive Talks provided for under the Ouagadougou Agreement. He immediately initiated consultations with the representatives of the international community in Mali as well as with the Parties to the Talks, particularly the armed groups.

3. It is within this framework that the efforts made by Algeria enabled the actual launching of the Inter Malian Inclusive Peace Talks, with the support of several members of the international community (AU, Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), United Nations (UN), European Union (EU) and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and the following countries of the Region: Burkina Faso, Mauritania, Niger and Chad. Indeed, during several weeks of discussions in Algiers with the Malian armed movements, the Algerian authorities encouraged these movements to place themselves in good faith in the peace process and to ensure coherence in their respective positions. These efforts resulted in the signing, on 9 June 2014, of the «Algiers Declaration» by three armed movements, namely the National Liberation Movement of Azawad (MNLA), the High Council for the Unity of Azawad (HCUA) and a branch of the Arab Movement of Azawad (MAA), which consider themselves as the true opponents of the Government of Mali. On 14 June 2014, three other movements, the Coalition of the People for Azawad (CPA – a dissident group of MNLA), the Coordination

of Patriotic Resistance Movements and Forces (CMFPR), and the other branch of MAA, considered by the others as being close to the Malian Government, signed the «Algiers Preliminary Platform».

4. Furthermore, the Algerian authorities brought together in Algiers, from 7 to 14 July 2014, experts representing the afore-mentioned Regional and International Organizations and the countries of the Region concerned to prepare the Talks. On 16 July 2014, a Ministerial meeting involving all these actors considered a «Draft Roadmap of Negotiations within the framework of the Algiers Process» prepared by the experts. The Draft was considered then adopted and signed by the Parties (Malian Government and armed movements) on 24 July 2014. This Roadmap spells out the basic principles and references of the Talks and determines the different issues to be discussed to resolve the Malian conflict, by indicating the format of the Talks, the composition of the Mediation team led by Algeria but including the representatives of the above-mentioned five Regional and International Organizations and the countries of the Region, identifies the parties to the Talks and lays down a calendar for the Talks. This calendar provides for a process lasting about 100 days, subdivided into different phases marked by periods of suspension or consultation on the ground in Mali. The next phase is scheduled for 17 August to 11 September 2014. It should, however, be pointed out that the signatory Movements of the «Algiers Declaration» so far have refused to be in the same hall as those of the «Algiers Preliminary Platform». Therefore, the negotiations took place in two separate groups, thus making the work of the Facilitators difficult. It is hoped that this situation will be overcome during the next phases.

b) Security Situation in Mali

5. The major towns in northern Mali had been liberated since May 2013 thanks to the joint efforts of the African-led International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA) and the French Operation "Serval", in support of the Malian Defence and Security Forces (FDSM). However, the current situation is marked by the persistence of security incidents and the continuation of attacks perpetrated by armed and terrorist groups still active in the three northern regions (Gao, Kidal and Timbuktu), especially in the Adrar des Ifoghas, in the far northeast of the country. Many attacks, kidnappings, as well as communal clashes were reported over the past months.

6. On 17 May 2014, on the occasion of the visit of the Prime Minister of Mali, Moussa Mara, to the town of Kidal then on 21 May 2014, violent fighting between the FDSM and the armed movements, particularly the MNLA, HCUA and MAA, which were against the visit. The fighting resulted in heavy casualties and the temporary reoccupation of positions previously held by the FDSM. On 23 May 2014 President Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz of Mauritania, Current Chairman of the AU, went to Kidal, where he obtained the signing of a Ceasefire Agreement by the armed movements that occupied that area and the Government of Mali. Under this Agreement, the armed movements pledged to put an end to the hostilities, participate in the Inclusive Talks,

release the elements of the FDSM and the civilians they had imprisoned and facilitate the humanitarian operations.

7. Notwithstanding this agreement, the Inclusive Peace Talks in Algiers coincided with the resumption of clashes between some armed in the north of the country, especially in the Tabankort-Anefis-Almoustarat-Tarkint-sector. In the face of this situation a "Declaration on Cessation of Hostilities" was adopted in Algiers, on 24 July 2014, together with the Roadmap of the Talks, in order to strengthen the Ceasefire Agreement of 23 May and its Implementation Modalities agreed upon on 13 June 2014. An observation and verification team, comprising the representatives of the AU and the UN, went to those areas on 30 July 2014 in order to monitor the situation more closely and make recommendations on ways and means to stabilize the situation. This situation of insecurity in the north of Mali has a negative impact on the movement of people and goods, the return of refugees and displaced persons, as well as the redeployment of the administration and basic socio-economic services in the regions concerned.

8. It should be pointed out, however, that the process of ongoing Inclusive Talks in Algiers should ultimately lead to a significant improvement in this insecurity situation, including the resolution of issues of cantonment, demobilization and reintegration of the elements of the armed movements and the reform of the Malian Defense and Security Forces.

c) The Situation in the Sahel

9. At the security level, the situation in the Sahel is marked by the increase in terrorist attacks, trafficking of all kinds, the prevalence of cross-border crime, the existence of refugee and displaced persons camps, likely to be infiltrated by terrorist groups and the existence of safe havens, a training and logistics supply centers for terrorists. The link between terrorism, drug trafficking and cross-border crime gives the armed terrorist and criminal groups the capacity of regeneration and nuisance that threatens all the countries of the Sahel and beyond. These terrorist groups strive to control the routes and the trafficking, thus thriving thanks to the vulnerabilities that characterize the Sahel region. This situation is worsened by the porous nature of the borders and weak capacity of states to cope with it.

10. The links between the groups operating in the region is increasingly being confirmed. The continuous deterioration of the political and security situation in Libya, compounds the security concerns in the region. The Assessment missions undertaken in the region in 2013 and 2014 by the African Centre for the Study and Research on Terrorism (ACSRT) and the Fusion and Liaison Unit (UFL) confirm these threats and the difficulties of the States to cope with them.

11. The countries of the region continue their efforts to enhance security cooperation and the operationalization of the African Peace and Security Architecture in the Sahelo-Saharan region, within the framework of the Nouakchott Process launched by the AU Commission in March 2013. Within the framework of this Process, the Commission, in relation with the countries of the region, convenes regular meetings of the Heads of Intelligence and Security Services (HISS) to exchange views on the security situation in the region. The appropriate Ministers meet every six months. To date, the HISS has held five meetings, while ministers have already met three times.

12. At the 3rd meeting of the Foreign Ministers of the countries of the region and the Fifth Meeting of Heads of Intelligence and Security Services, held respectively on 19 February 2014 in Niamey, and on 19 and 20 May 2014 in Ouagadougou a number of decisions were adopted to strengthen and deepen the Nouakchott Process. It is worth mentioning in particular those concerning the establishment of a light secretariat for the coordination of the Process in Niamey, under the leadership of the MISAHEL; the preparation of a generic Concept of Operations for the establishment of joint teams and joint border patrols as well as the organization of a future meeting of the Chiefs of Defense Staff and Ministers of Defense of the countries of the region to consider the said Concept. It is also envisaged the convening of a future Summit of the countries participating in the Nouakchott Process, in order to mobilize greater political support for the Process.

III. ROLE AND EFFORTS OF THE AU / MISAHEL

a) Political Efforts

13. The AU, through MISAHEL plays an important role in the efforts aimed at overcoming the challenges to peace and security in Mali and in the Sahelo-Saharan region. As regards the political situation in Mali, the AU High Representative for Mali and the Sahel, Head of MISAHEL, former President Pierre Buyoya, actively participated in the negotiations that led to the signing of the Ouagadougou Agreement and MISAHEL plays an active role in monitoring its implementation, through particularly the Follow up and Evaluation Committee and the Joint Technical Security Commission established under the Agreement. The AU has also provided multiform support, including financial support, to the organization of the Presidential and Legislative elections in 2013 in Mali. Within the framework of the Inclusive Talks underway in Algiers, the AU is one of five regional and international organizations that, around Algeria, constitute the college of Mediators / Facilitators. It provides, in this context, technical support, through advice, to the Government and the armed movements to encourage compromise and promote the spirit of dialogue and cooperation between the parties.

14. During the campaign for the Presidential and Legislative elections in 2013 in Mali, the High Representative increased the number of meetings with the candidates and the different social and political stakeholders to exchange views on the mechanisms

put in place to ensure the smooth conduct of the elections and advocate for consensus and respect for all legal channels for any electoral dispute. To ensure regional cooperation and coordination of actions of the AU with the regional organizations and the countries of the Sahel, he participated in the different ECOWAS summits and visited a number of countries of the region to exchange views with them on issues of common interest.

15. The High Representative maintains close and cordial cooperation relations with the AU bilateral and multilateral partners present in Bamako, especially ECOWAS, the United Nations, the EU, the United States and France, with whose representatives he often carries out joint actions with the authorities of the country. Similarly, he holds regular consultations with the civil society, the media, women's associations working in the field of peace and reconciliation in the region, as well as some important social and cultural structures for peace and reconciliation in Mali.

b) Efforts in the field of Security

16. Within the framework of capacity building of the MDSF, the AU High Representative handed over on 14 July 2014, to the Malian authorities the keys of a first batch of thirteen (13) out of twenty(20) vehicles offered by the AU. Of a market value of one million U.S. Dollars, the donation consists of thirteen (13) pick-ups, four (4) ambulances and three (3) trucks, all of Toyota make. On the same day he officially launched the first humanitarian activity of MISAHÉL in Mali during a Press Conference. Entitled " Hampers from the Heart," launched with a symbolic budget of 40 000 USD, this initiative aims at providing food and nutrition assistance to poor families, especially those most affected by the crisis that Mali has been going through since 2012, including the IDPs. The first hampers were distributed in Kidal in northern Mali, thanks to a Convention signed with the Malian Red Cross.

c) Efforts in the field of Development

17. With the interest of the international community in the Sahel, there has been a multiplication of initiatives and strategies on the Sahel. Given the importance of coordinating international efforts in the Sahel, a Ministerial Platform was established following a meeting of Ministers of the region and international partners in Bamako, on 5 November 2013. Under the Malian Chairmanship, this Platform held its second meeting on 16 May 2014 in Bamako. The platform is supported by a Technical Secretariat, which is co-chaired by the AU and the UN and comprises other institutions. The participants in the Ministerial meeting of 16 May 2014 agreed on the need particularly to map and harmonize the different strategies / initiatives for the Sahel and establish thematic working groups on the major aspects of the different strategies. The MISAHÉL has been charged with the responsibility to prepare the mapping project.

IV. AU STRATEGY FOR THE SAHEL REGION

18. Under the auspices of the Commission, the MISAHHEL prepared the document "Strategy of the African Union for the Sahel Region", which aims at breathing new life and ensure more systematic contribution of the AU to the efforts of security, governance and development in the region. This strategy is based on three pillars: (i) governance (ii) security and (iii) development. Each of the three pillars is declined into priorities which are translated into concrete actions and projects. The Strategy is accompanied by an annual Plan of Action to facilitate the execution of its aspects as well as a communication strategy to facilitate the dissemination of information on actions carried out within the framework of the Strategy.

19. On the basis of the principles of complementarity and comparative advantages, it is expected that the effective implementation of this Strategy will require the assistance and cooperation of the countries of the region, the Regional Economic Communities (RECs), the Regional Mechanisms in the Sahel and African financial institutions, and other relevant regional organization or mechanism, including the African private sector and research centres and academic institutions. The Strategy is in pursuance of a number of relevant instruments, particularly the Constitutive Act of the AU and the Agenda 2063.

20. The Strategy identifies a number of assumptions and factors on which its effective implementation depends, especially the following:

- (a) that the countries of the Sahel will continue to demonstrate a political will to cooperate with the AU / MISAHHEL and the partners;
- (b) that the absence of any major disruption in the stabilization process in Mali and the absence of any incident of major and widespread instability elsewhere in the region;
- (c) the primacy given to regional/continental cooperation and the pursuit of multilateral assistance;
- (d) the transcending of challenges of interoperability between the forces and the technical structures of different countries in order to facilitate the adoption of harmonized procedures
- (e) the availability of the necessary financial resources from reliable sources of funding .

V. OBSERVATIONS

21. There are still several challenges in the Sahel region, at the political, security and socio-economic levels. However, efforts are underway and should be encouraged and pursued. For example, since his election and as part of deepening friendship and cooperation with neighboring countries, the Malian President, Ibrahim Boubacar Keita, has paid State visits to several countries of the region. These visits made it possible to reactivate relations between Mali and these countries and the reiteration by the latter, of their commitment to support Mali in its efforts to restore peace in the country.

22. Council may welcome the progress made in the region, particularly with regard to the completion of the Transition process and the actual restoration of constitutional order in Mali, the launching Inclusive Peace Talks between the Malian parties, the enhancement of regional cooperation and the progress made in the Nouakchott Process. The Council may, at the same time, express its concern about the continuing insecurity in the region and appeal to the countries of the Sahel to further strengthen their cooperation and pool their efforts to adopt common strategies to fight against security threats.

23. Council may wish to congratulate the Algerian authorities and the Malian parties and the countries of the region on their efforts in the process of the Inter-Malian Inclusive Talks. In this regard, Council may appeal to the Malian armed movements to exercise tolerance and mutual acceptance in order to be able to sit around the same negotiating table.

24. Council may adopt the Strategy of the African Union for Mali and the Sahel and commend the AU High Representative for Mali and the Sahel for his tireless efforts to promote peace, security, good governance and development in the region. Council may appeal to all the AU Member States to provide the necessary support to the Strategy, including financial assistance, for the effective execution of the different projects contained therein. In so doing it will enable the AU play its natural role of leadership in the Sahel and support the efforts of the countries and the appropriate regional organizations in the region.