

Mr President,

Allow me to start by commending all the speakers. Your briefings supplement the information we received during our mission to Mali and Burkina Faso in March. I would also like to thank the Secretary General for his report.

Mr President,

In 2014, Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger and Chad decided to join forces to face their common challenges. Five years later, this original initiative is more relevant than ever. Belgium is in favour of the G5 Sahel Joint Force receiving a mandate under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations. This Force must also receive sufficient and lasting funding. This is why we also support this Force being funded by United Nations assessed contributions, under well-defined conditions.

In the meantime, Belgium supports the operationalisation of the Joint Force - through the European Union, of course, as well as bilaterally. Last year, Belgium paid one million euros so that MINUSMA could provide logistical support to the Joint Force. Belgium also supports the G5 Sahel Defence College, for which it provides trainers. In Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, Belgian soldiers provide training to their Sahelian colleagues. I would like to

stress the fact that the success of regional security cooperation largely depends on the existence of strong national armies. In this respect, in the context of Mali, we support the Secretary General's call for a global reform of the security sector.

Over the last few months, the Joint Force has undergone two positive changes that we must welcome; firstly, the relaunching of the Force's operations in January. Secondly, the gradual introduction of the Compliance Framework for human rights and international humanitarian law.

We strongly encourage the G5 Sahel States to continue their work in these two areas.

Admittedly, some of the equipment promised to the Force has not yet been delivered and this has an impact on the operational planning. But other resources exist and can now be used. The continued introduction of the Compliance Framework for human rights, the development of the police component, the operation of the Permanent Secretariat and the Defence and Security Committee, the updating of the concept of operations and the introduction of an international support coordination mechanism such as the Monitoring Group are examples of areas in which the G5 Sahel can easily continue its operational work with the resources already available.

Mr President,

Belgium is deeply concerned by the deterioration in the security and humanitarian situation in Sahel.

As in any crisis, the solution is first and foremost political and there are a number of actions to be taken.

A firm response to security issues is clearly required, one that dismantles terrorist networks, cuts off their funding sources and foils their deadly narrative.

But the deep-seated aspirations of the population and the different communities also deserve to be heard, to avoid the situation escalating into violence. There is no miracle cure, but rather a whole range of measures that can be developed in the areas of governance, the rule of law, the fight against corruption and impunity, respect for human rights, combating any form of stigmatisation against certain ethnic groups or communities, the provision of basic services and adaptation to climate change.

In this respect, we must shed light on the events in Boulikessi and draw all the necessary conclusions at judicial level.

With regards to the situation in Burkina Faso, Belgium is following closely the efforts of the Secretary-General to adapt the support of the United Nations.

Mr President,

Belgium supports the tripartite arrangement between the G5 Sahel, the EU and MINUSMA. We regret the under-use of resources due to the absence of operations, as well as the excessively restricted framework of conditionality imposed on MINUSMA. To echo the plea heard during our Council's mission on the ground, Belgium calls for the pragmatic adaptation of MINUSMA support to the Joint Force; the enemies of peace know no boundaries.

Thank you.