

Mr President,

I would like to thank the various briefers for their contributions and insights.

Belgium remains a committed partner of the Sahel countries, the G5 Sahel and its Joint Force. We share their determination to combat insecurity and promote development in the region.

Belgium acts both as part of the EU's efforts to support the region and on a bilateral basis. The shared objective is to contribute to the security, stabilisation and resilience of populations in a context of growing insecurity. This is why Belgium favours a comprehensive approach aimed at ensuring coherent actions with a view to helping to end the crisis and establish lasting peace. This approach and action take the form of actions at the political, diplomatic, security (including internal security), humanitarian and development cooperation levels.

It was in that capacity that we participated in the ministerial round table on the crisis in the Central Sahel on 20 October. This meeting aimed to identify the priority needs, such as humanitarian aid. Our Minister for Development Cooperation announced an additional contribution of 8 million euros, demonstrating the importance of the region to our country.

As mentioned earlier, the security and humanitarian situation in the region is of great concern and is well known. I would like to dwell on one particular

aspect: half of the population of the Sahel is under 15 years of age. As a result of ongoing conflicts and, more recently, the pandemic, tens of millions of children no longer have access to school or education. This lack of education and teaching deprives them of prospects and contributes to their search for alternatives such as those provided by armed groups. They are thus more exposed to the risks of recruitment by armed groups, sexual violence, and labour - or other forms of - exploitation. The region's governments are committed to ensuring continuity of education, which Belgium welcomes. There is no doubt, however, that the challenges in this area remain immense and need to be addressed.

With regard to the Joint Force, Belgium welcomes the various advances made in its operationalisation, as mentioned in the Secretary-General's report, and encourages their continuation. With regard to operational and logistical support provided to the Joint Force by MINUSMA, we continue to advocate for the implementation of those aspects set out in resolution 2531 relating to the provision of consumables.

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In Belgium's view, military operations and development projects alone will not be enough to defeat terrorism in the Sahel. Terrorist action is fuelled by the political and governance crisis in several Sahelian states. This also requires a new political commitment and ownership at the highest level to enhance the democratic institutions of the Sahel, and to seek new political solutions to counter the deadly terrorist rhetoric. In particular, we consider that institutions must fight against any form of stigmatisation of ethnic groups or communities and work actively to provide a framework of governance to ease tensions between communities. The provision of basic services, including security, helps to strengthen the bond with and confidence of the population. The fight against impunity, and transitional justice are also crucial to this end.

In this regard, Belgium continues to monitor allegations of extrajudicial executions by the security forces of the G5 countries. Belgium understands the enormous challenges and vulnerabilities faced by the security forces of our G5 partners. But respect for the rule of law and fundamental human rights is, in our view, a prerequisite for defeating terrorism and avoiding fuelling the breeding ground on which it thrives. Progress in security and development is, of course, crucial, but if human rights and the rule of law are not respected, this progress will unfortunately remain temporary and terrorism and insecurity will continue to grow.

In conclusion, Belgium encourages the five G5 countries and the Joint Force to strengthen the implementation of the Human Rights Compliance Framework, supported by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, as it is one of the main tools that can help prevent possible violations in the future. We acknowledge the progress made in this area, which demonstrates the commitment of these countries.

Thank you.