
Mr President,

Belgium thanks the Chinese mission for organising a debate on terrorism and violent extremism in Africa. The African continent is severely affected by terrorism, unfortunately increasingly so. This debate is therefore timely.

Members and supporters of ISIS and Al Qaeda are entrenched in conflict zones, particularly in the Sahel, Somalia and the Arabian Peninsula, where they are using the deceptive rhetoric of resistance to target a population that is often marginalised and disillusioned by a lack of economic opportunities. Local conflicts are exploited by terrorist movements such as Boko Haram, AQIM, al-Shabaab and ISWAP. These groups are taking over competences normally devolved to States, imposing their ideology of violent extremism. We note with concern that the number of attacks by ISIS and Al-Qaida members in the Sahel region is increasing alarmingly.

It is also worrying that these groups are increasingly working together, in contrast to their rivalries in the Middle East and elsewhere in the world, attacking civilian infrastructures, military convoys and government buildings.

Terrorism on the African continent is being combined with transnational crime. This is compounded by other sources of instability, such as the proliferation of armed groups and human trafficking.

Mr President,

I realise that the picture I am painting of the situation may seem bleak. The challenges are indeed vast and I understand our African colleagues when they sometimes feel helpless. However, it is important to rise to the challenge. In this respect, **the African continent needs our support** and it can count on that of my country and the EU. As a member of the EU, Belgium wishes to recall the importance of following an integrated approach in the fight against terrorism. The EU is following such an approach, mobilising the full range of its instruments, including high-level political diplomacy, regular consultations, mediation for conflict prevention and resolution, restrictive measures and cooperation in the fight against terrorism and organised crime, including human trafficking.

It is indeed obvious that the phenomenon of terrorism in Africa goes far beyond the realm of law enforcement. A problem so deeply rooted in the region's specific challenges requires an

integrated and comprehensive approach to society. We will not succeed simply by putting in place more sophisticated surveillance techniques, or creating a culture of repression by the security forces. Those African countries where terrorism finds fertile ground also need **economic development and political prospects rooted in high-quality education**. Indeed, it is important to continue strengthening young people's resilience against toxic rhetoric from ISIS and AQ members, whilst providing them with sustainable, inclusive economic opportunities and future prospects.

In this regard, I would like to refer to the joint communication of 9 March from the European Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy on a comprehensive strategy with Africa, which highlights, in particular, the importance of our cooperation on peace and governance.

If we are to strengthen the resilience of African communities against the harmful influence of terrorism, it will be essential:

- to strengthen governance and address the sense of exclusion and lack of trust in government structures;
- to enable civil society to operate in a safe and thriving space;
- to promote political inclusion, including that of women, in the development of strategies to combat violent extremism;
- to build a counter-terrorism policy that does not prevent individuals and civil society from enjoying their human rights and fundamental freedoms;
- to recognise the considerable role played by non-governmental organisations in the impartial distribution of humanitarian aid;
- to mitigate the negative effects of the fight against terrorism on these humanitarian activities.

I therefore welcome the fact that **African countries are increasingly working together** on this thorny issue, with several regional and sub-regional initiatives, in partnership with the United Nations, where the same conclusions are being drawn.

Mr President,

The above-mentioned points of attention are included in the Charter of the United Nations, in numerous Security Council resolutions and in the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. Belgium supports more than ever the efforts of the United Nations in the fight against terrorism on the African continent, as well as the partnerships between the United Nations and the regional organisations in this appropriate framework. The fight against terrorism can only be effective if all the measures taken by the Member States to combat terrorism fully respect the obligations of international law: human rights, international law on refugees and international humanitarian law.

We are ready to continue our efforts to fight against terrorism, working with the utmost solidarity alongside and together with our African partners.

Thank you.