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Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel

Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution [2391 \(2017\)](#), in which the Council requested me, in close coordination with the States members of the Group of Five for the Sahel (G5 Sahel) – Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and the Niger – and the African Union, to report on the activities of the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel. It provides an update on progress made in the operationalization of the Joint Force since my report of 11 November 2019 ([S/2019/868](#)), including international support for the Force, the implementation of the technical agreement signed between the United Nations, the European Union and G5 Sahel States in February 2018, challenges encountered by the Force and the implementation by the G5 Sahel States of a human rights and international humanitarian law compliance framework.

II. Political, security and humanitarian developments in the Sahel

2. The reporting period was marked by a deterioration in the security situation in Mali and the Sahel region, characterized by a rise in increasingly complex terrorist attacks, primarily targeting the armed and security forces. Higher rates of civilian casualties were also recorded. According to preliminary reports, terrorist groups are taking advantage of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic to intensify their attacks and to challenge State authority throughout the subregion, especially in the Liptako-Gourma triangle. There is also evidence of increased coordination and cooperation between some of the terrorist groups operating throughout the Sahel, from Mauritania to the Lake Chad basin. During the period, the desire of such groups to extend their area of influence also fuelled conflict over resources with other groups, including between Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin and Islamic State in the Greater Sahara.

3. In Mali, the reporting period was marked by a series of deadly attacks against the Malian armed forces, including in Indelimane, Ménaka Region, on 1 November and in Tabankort, Ménaka Region, on 18 November. In an attack on a Malian armed forces position by unidentified assailants in Tarkint, Gao Region, on 19 March, 29 soldiers were killed. On 6 April, a Malian armed forces camp was attacked in the



village of Bamba, Bourem Cercle, Gao Region, and 25 soldiers were killed. Intercommunal violence continued to claim civilian casualties in central Mali. In response to the increase in attacks, the Malian armed forces launched Operation Maliko in February 2020, with the objective of restoring State authority across the country.

4. On 10 December, 71 members of the Niger armed forces were killed in a terrorist attack on a military base in I-n-Atès, which was later claimed by Islamic State in the Greater Sahara. On 25 December, near Sanam, in Tillabéri Region, another 14 soldiers were killed by armed militants. On 9 January, a large-scale attack targeting the Chinagodrar military post, also in Tillabéri Region, left 89 soldiers dead.

5. In Burkina Faso, the armed forces continued to be targeted by terrorist groups. In the east of the country, the number of attacks and incursions by presumed elements of Islamic State in the Greater Sahara from the Niger increased, targeting both civilians and the armed and security forces. On 24 December, unidentified assailants launched an attack on the military camp in Aribinda, Soum Province, during which at least 7 soldiers and at least 35 civilians were killed. The armed forces managed to repel several attacks and seize a large number of weapons and narcotics in the past weeks, indicating that the illicit economy, transnational organized crime and trafficking routes continued to remain important incentives and lucrative sources of revenue for terrorist groups. In an unprecedented move, on 21 January, the National Assembly unanimously adopted a bill to authorize the recruitment and arming of civilian volunteers by the defence and security forces.

6. Attacks on the security forces resulted in the withdrawal of a State presence from the areas concerned and a further deterioration in the humanitarian situation. In Burkina Faso, Chad, the Gambia, Guinea, Mali, the Niger and Senegal, 14.7 million people were in need of humanitarian assistance by 1 May. By March 2020, over 1.4 million people were internally displaced across the five G5 Sahel countries. The most significant rise was seen in Burkina Faso, where over 780,000 people were displaced, compared with 44,000 in 2018.

7. While these trends are alarming, the Joint Force's operational tempo increased throughout the reporting period. For the first time since its establishment, it was able to simultaneously carry out and plan operations. In addition, operations increased in scale and duration, and several regional and international security initiatives were launched, aimed at supporting the Force and intensifying counter-terrorism efforts in the region.

A. Efforts to address security challenges in the Sahel

8. On 15 December, following the attack in I-n-Atès, the fourth extraordinary session of the Conference of Heads of State of the G5 Sahel was convened in Niamey. The Heads of State expressed profound concern about the increase in the number of terrorist attacks and paid tribute to the victims. They called upon the Security Council to consider the request by the G5 Sahel to place the Joint Force under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations and to strengthen the mandate of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), while urging the international community to consider a plan modelled on the Marshall Plan to support development in the Sahel. Among other measures, the Heads of State extended the mandate of the Force Commander, General Oumarou Namata Gazama of the Niger, from one to two years and instructed the G5 Sahel Council of Ministers and permanent secretariat to revise the strategic concept of operations.

9. On 13 January, on the initiative of France, during an extraordinary summit held in Pau, France, the Heads of State of Burkina Faso, Chad, France, Mali, Mauritania

and the Niger reaffirmed their shared determination to combat terrorist groups operating in the Sahel. They paid tribute to the victims of terrorism and expressed support for the continued military engagement of France and other international forces to protect civilians, defend the sovereignty of the G5 Sahel States and prevent the terrorist threat from spreading. They announced the creation of the Coalition for the Sahel, an overarching international framework to coordinate efforts in the region. The Coalition is open to any country willing to join. The framework is centred around the following four pillars: efforts to combat terrorism; capacity-building for the defence and security forces in the region; support for the re-establishment of a State presence; and development assistance.

10. Under the first pillar of the Coalition for the Sahel, the Heads of State also announced the creation of a joint command mechanism for all military forces conducting counter-terrorism operations in the Liptako-Gourma triangle, including the Joint Force, the Operation Barkhane forces led by France and Task Force Takuba, a combined joint special operations forces task force for the Sahel, to coordinate and plan joint activities. The mechanism includes a combined command post in Niamey, co-located with the Force's headquarters in Sector Centre, an intelligence fusion cell in Niamey and a liaison office in N'Djamena within the Operation Barkhane headquarters.

11. On 24 and 25 January, as instructed by the Conference of Heads of State, the Defence and Security Committee of the G5 Sahel, a strategic governing body of the Joint Force comprising the five national army chiefs of staff, met in Ouagadougou to revise the Force's strategic concept of operations. They agreed to extend the maximum range for the right to hot pursuit, whereby armed forces of each G5 Sahel State may pursue presumed terrorist elements across the borders of the neighbouring States for up to 100 km. The limit had previously been set at 50 km. In addition, troops under Force command are no longer limited to operating on their own national territories and within their respective sectors, but are permitted, following a political decision of the Governments concerned, to be deployed to different sectors in other G5 Sahel States.

12. On 13 March, following that decision, Chad announced the deployment of a Chadian armed forces battalion comprising 650 troops to the Niger in Sector Centre, to reinforce the Joint Force's efforts in the Liptako-Gourma triangle and to support the Coalition for the Sahel. Following an attack by Boko Haram on the Chadian armed forces on the Bohoma Peninsula on 23 March, during which at least 92 soldiers were killed, the Chadian authorities indicated that the deployment of the contingent would be delayed. From 31 March to 8 April, Chad conducted Operation "Wrath of Bohoma" in the Lake Chad basin, reportedly resulting in the deaths of over 1,000 terrorists and 50 Chadian soldiers. After the conclusion of the operation, the Government reiterated its commitment to regional counter-terrorism activities, including the Force and the Coalition for the Sahel, as well as to MINUSMA.

13. On 23 and 24 February, the G5 Sahel convened the seventh ordinary session of the Council of Ministers. It was decided that the permanent secretariat would be transformed into an executive secretariat, led by an executive secretary, the former Permanent Secretary, with increased administrative autonomy. A new administration and finance directorate and four divisions (resilience, security and defence, infrastructure and development, and governance) were established as part of the reforms. Ministers for foreign affairs and ministers of defence condemned the upsurge in terrorist attacks in the region and called upon donors to honour the pledges of financial support announced during the high-level conference on the Sahel held in Brussels on 23 February 2018. They also reiterated the request for the Security Council to authorize a mandate for the Joint Force under Chapter VII of the Charter, which, in their view, would ensure sustainable financial support. The Alliance for the

Sahel, a development coalition set up in July 2017 on the initiative of France and Germany and made up of 13 countries, donors and development agencies, held a general assembly for all its members on the margins of the meeting, to foster development cooperation and coordination in the G5 Sahel region.

14. On 25 February, the sixth annual summit of the G5 Sahel Heads of State was convened in Nouakchott. The G5 Sahel presidency was transferred from the President of Burkina Faso, Roch Marc Christian Kaboré, to the President of Mauritania, Mohamed Ould Cheikh Ghazouani.

15. On 28 April, Mr. Ghazouani and the President of the European Council, Charles Michel, co-chaired a high-level videoconference between the European Union and the G5 Sahel Heads of State on behalf of the G5 Sahel presidency. The high-level meeting was also attended by the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell, in the presence of the Deputy Secretary-General, Amina Mohamed, and the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, Moussa Faki Mahamat. Participants adopted a joint declaration, building upon the outcomes of the summit held in Pau, in which they underlined their joint commitment to pursuing efforts under the four pillars of the Coalition for the Sahel. The European Union announced an additional €194 million to support security, stability and resilience programmes in the Sahel. The sum includes €112 million for strengthening the security and defence capabilities of the G5 Sahel countries, while ensuring respect for human rights and international humanitarian law, as well as re-establishing the presence of the State and basic services throughout the territory. The remaining amount of €82 million has been earmarked for development support.

B. Other regional initiatives

16. At the twenty-third extraordinary summit of the West African Monetary and Economic Union, held in Dakar on 4 December, Heads of State and Government decided to grant \$100 million in immediate support to the three G5 Sahel States most exposed to terrorist threats: Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger. At the fifty-sixth ordinary session of the Authority of Heads of State and Government of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), held in Abuja on 21 December, the Authority approved an action plan to eradicate terrorism for the period 2020–2024. It adopted a \$2.3 billion budget, of which \$1 billion is to be drawn from internal resources and the remainder to be mobilized externally. Concerned about the growing terrorist threat in the region, the Authority also reiterated calls for the Security Council to grant a mandate under Chapter VII of the Charter to the Joint Force. The President of the Niger and Chair of the Authority, Mahamadou Issoufou, called for enhanced capacities for the Force, including through the involvement of the ECOWAS Standby Force and the support of the African Union.

17. At its thirty-third ordinary session, held in Addis Ababa on 9 and 10 February, the Assembly of the African Union requested the African Union Commission to develop, in consultation with the ministries of defence of the G5 Sahel countries and the ECOWAS Commission, a framework for the possible deployment, under the relevant provisions of the African Union Peace and Security Council protocol related to the African Standby Force, of a regional counter-terrorism force composed of the Multinational Joint Task Force and 3,000 additional troops for a six-month period. The Assembly also instructed the Permanent Representatives Committee to explore funding options to cover the costs of the deployment. A concept note is under development for approval by the Peace and Security Council.

18. On 27 March, the Governments of Belgium, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Mali, the Netherlands, the Niger, Norway, Portugal, Sweden and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland issued a statement in which they expressed support for the creation of a task force, integrated into the command of Operation Barkhane, aimed at tackling terrorist groups in the Liptako-Gourma triangle. Known as Task Force Takuba, it will advise, assist and accompany the Malian armed forces, in coordination with G5 Sahel partners and other international actors on the ground. Its deployment has been delayed owing to the COVID-19 outbreak, but troops are expected to be deployed in 2020. In the statement, the Governments welcomed the declared contributions by Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, France, the Netherlands and Portugal, as well as the planned contribution by Sweden.

III. Operationalization of the Joint Force

A. Military component

19. In January, the Malian armed forces reinforced their battalion deployed under Joint Force command in Sector Centre with two additional companies, based in Tessit and Boulekessi. On 13 March, Chad announced the deployment of a second battalion under Force command to Sector Centre, but this was delayed (see para. 12). No detailed figures were available with regard to the Force's current troop strength, which is estimated to be at least 85 per cent of its planned strength.

20. In December, the Government of Mali allocated land for the new headquarters of the Joint Force in the vicinity of the airport in Bamako. The construction of temporary accommodation and office buildings began on 1 April with MINUSMA support (see para. 41).

21. From October to February, the Joint Force conducted three operations in Sector Centre: Operations Pagnali 2 and 3 in Mali and Operation Samparga 3 in the Niger. They were conducted in coordination with Operations Bourgou 4 and 5 and Koufra 10 under Operation Barkhane.

22. Following the summit held in Pau, France, the joint command mechanism of the Coalition for the Sahel was established in Niamey on 15 February, based at the Joint Force's headquarters for Sector Centre. It includes a forward command post of the Force Commander, an Operation Barkhane detachment and an intelligence fusion cell. The Force also deployed liaison officers to the headquarters of Operation Barkhane in N'Djamena. The joint command mechanism facilitated coordination and planning for the various operations conducted in March, namely Operations Sama (Joint Force), Monclar (Operation Barkhane) and Almahou (Niger).

23. In close coordination with Operation Barkhane and national armed forces in the Liptako-Gourma area, the Joint Force launched Operation Sama on 3 March. In order to facilitate coordination with MINUSMA, the Force deployed a liaison officer to the Mission in Gao. The first phase of the operation, focused on the Gourma Region, concluded at the end of March. During the operation, six hostages held by Islamic State in the Greater Sahara were freed in Gargassa and Fererio, Burkina Faso, and several members of the group were neutralized.

24. On 19 December, the European Union, the Joint Force and MINUSMA held an extraordinary tripartite coordination meeting, during which the Force expressed concerns regarding the limited efficiency of the current support model. It suggested measures beyond the current legal framework provided by the Mission's mandate and the technical arrangement signed on 18 February 2018 to address shortcomings. The measures included a request for MINUSMA to manage commercial contracts on

behalf of the Force in order to ensure the delivery of supplies (life support consumables, lubricants and fuel) to the Force's areas of operation outside Mali. In addition, the Force requested MINUSMA to establish contracts on its behalf for vertical construction work, including the temporary structures for its new headquarters on land allocated by the Government of Mali in Bamako (see para. 41). The European Union supported the requests and stressed its flexibility regarding the use of funds already disbursed to MINUSMA. Such a step would require changes to the mandate and the tripartite technical arrangement (see para. 45).

25. Owing to the COVID-19 outbreak, the Governments of Mali and Mauritania decided to close their shared border. This led to the postponement of operations planned in Sectors West and East, namely Operations Amane 3 and Deréa. The impact of the pandemic on the ability of the Joint Force and international forces to conduct operations in the coming months was difficult to ascertain at the time of writing and will need to be carefully and continuously assessed.

B. Police component

26. In December, MINUSMA, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, in coordination with the Joint Force and the G5 Sahel executive secretariat, jointly organized a workshop in Niamey, bringing together actors of the penal chain, including special investigations units, prosecutors, the military, provosts and corrections officers, from all G5 Sahel countries to identify challenges and propose recommendations related to the operationalization of the Force's police component. Following the workshop, the executive secretariat and the Force, with the support of international partners, began to develop a directive for the full operationalization of the component.

27. During the reporting period, the Joint Force deployed 26 provosts in two of its three sectors: 13 in Sector West (Goma Coura) and 13 in Sector Centre (Boulekessi). Support for the judicial police in each of the G5 Sahel States constitutes an additional aspect of the operationalization of the police component. Given that there is no overarching mandate relating to the operationalization, various actors continue to support the judicial police in each State. Coordination and information-sharing between G5 Sahel countries and donors therefore remains challenging.

28. In Mali, the Specialized Investigation Brigade on Terrorism and Transnational Organized Crime was further operationalized, with the selection of a pool of 300 additional officers and the identification of a potential site for a satellite office in Mopti, close to Sector Centre. MINUSMA, together with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, continued to provide technical support to the Specialized Judicial Unit in building its investigative and prosecutorial capacity in close coordination with the European Union and those entities supporting the operationalization of the police component at the regional level.

29. Similarly, the Specialized Investigation Brigade on Terrorism and Transnational Organized Crime of Burkina Faso scaled up its capacity from 20 to 30 officers, including 2 women. Chad decided, by decree, to establish a satellite specialized investigation office in Bol, Lake Region, in the vicinity of Sector East, thus ensuring greater proximity between forces and investigators.

30. It has been challenging to track cases referred to the national judicial police by the Joint Force, as G5 Sahel countries usually do not distinguish between cases referred by armed forces acting under national command and those relating to operations conducted under the Force.

C. Human rights situation and implementation of the human rights and international humanitarian law compliance framework of the Joint Force

31. The MINUSMA and OHCHR field presences continued to monitor the human rights situation in relation to counter-terrorism operations conducted by the Joint Force. In Mali, the armed forces were implicated in a case of ill-treatment of a woman and the burning of several houses in the village of Timé, Mopti Region, on 12 February as they searched for items allegedly stolen from a Joint Force camp in Boulekessi in the context of an attack by extremist elements in September 2019. It remains unclear whether during the incident elements of the Malian armed forces acted under the command and control of the Joint Force or under a national command. This is due, inter alia, to the lack of a distinctive insignia for elements serving under the Force and a lack of communication, including the lack of civilian casualty tracking capacity for command responsibilities regarding human rights violations during operations.

32. In Mauritania, following the arrest of a former member of the Joint Force accused of killing a civilian on 13 March during a Force operation in Nbeiket el Ahouâch, a trial was scheduled for later in March before the Criminal Court of Néma. However, owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, all trials were suspended until further notice. The State Prosecutor requested the maximum sentence. The death penalty still exists in Mauritania but is never applied because of a moratorium in force since 1987.

33. During the reporting period, the Joint Force's human rights and international humanitarian law compliance framework was further consolidated with support from OHCHR. At its ninth extraordinary meeting, held in Ouagadougou on 24 and 25 January, the Defence and Security Committee of the G5 Sahel agreed on a gender-sensitive approach to force generation efforts, taking into account the need for greater participation of women in Force operations. Meanwhile, the Conference of the G5 Sahel Heads of State highlighted the need to develop a strategy for the protection of civilians for the five countries was highlighted, with the objective of strengthening the relationship between national forces, local authorities and civilian populations.

34. In addition, OHCHR, in collaboration with other partners, continued to support relevant G5 Sahel entities through the provision of capacity-building activities to enhance the implementation of the compliance framework. In Niamey in November, OHCHR, in coordination with the Sahel Defence College and the Joint Force, conducted a training-of-trainers course for 30 Niger army instructors (28 men and 2 women). Similar activities were scheduled to be conducted in Burkina Faso starting at the end of March, and in Chad in May, for a total of 60 officers, but were postponed owing to the COVID-19 pandemic. In February, OHCHR conducted the second advanced course for the G5 Sahel on human rights and international humanitarian law for military officers, legal advisers and chief provosts of the various battalions. A total of 23 participants (20 men and 3 women) benefited from the course, which was held in Nice, France, in collaboration with the International Institute of Humanitarian Law, and was aimed at enhancing respect for human rights and humanitarian law while countering terrorism.

35. In Niamey in December, OHCHR facilitated a regional workshop on human rights monitoring and the protection of sources, victims and witnesses, in collaboration with the G5 Sahel network of national human rights institutions and civil society organizations. The workshop was focused on ways to improve social cohesion, respect for human rights and civil-military relations.

36. In November and December, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), in collaboration with Alioune Blondin

Beye Peacekeeping School in Bamako, conducted national needs assessments on gender and human rights capacity-building for security sector actors of the G5 Sahel States. The assessments informed the development of a comprehensive training and capacity-building package to be rolled out for security sector institutions in the region. A total of 138 participants (43 of whom were women), including members of security and defence institutions and operational units and representatives of human and women's rights defenders and civil society organizations of the G5 Sahel States, received training to increase their capacity, in the context of gender and human rights, to prevent and combat violent extremism and terrorism in five national training workshops held in each country. The efforts were aimed at enhancing the interface between civil society organizations and relevant security sector institutions in the region and promoting people-centred approaches to prevent and counter violent extremism.

37. Under the same regional initiative, UN-Women carried out a study on mainstreaming human rights and gender equality in the security sector in the context of combating terrorism and violent extremism in the G5 Sahel States, which provided information and recommendations on the application of laws and frameworks that take into account gender and human rights in security responses in the G5 Sahel countries and regionally.

IV. International support for the Joint Force

A. Support from the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali

Life support consumables

38. MINUSMA continued to provide logistical support to the Joint Force in the framework of its mandate. The Mission received a quarterly support plan from the Force for the period from October to December 2019, requesting support for all seven battalions operating under Force command, through the provision of 34,800 combat ration packs and 410,600 litres of fuel and lubricants, amounting to approximately \$1.21 million. The Mission responded positively and approved all requests following a human rights due diligence policy risk assessment. However, owing to its limited transport capabilities, the Force was able to collect only life support consumables worth \$241,415, which represents a collection and consumption rate of 19.9 per cent.

39. On 26 December, MINUSMA received the Joint Force's quarterly support plan for the period from January to March 2020, which included 57,500 combat ration packs and 480,000 litres of fuel and lubricants, amounting to \$1,785,442. The Mission responded positively to the plan, including all specific requests, again after undertaking a human rights due diligence policy risk assessment. The Force was, however, in practice able to obtain support amounting to \$756,505, which represents a collection and consumption rate of 42.34 per cent.

40. As at 31 March, of the first allotment transferred by the European Union to MINUSMA to support the Joint Force in line with the technical arrangement (\$6.2 million), a total of \$2,980,590 had been spent, for a rate of expenditure of 48 per cent.

41. On 31 March, the G5 Sahel submitted its quarterly support plan for the period from April to June 2020. The pick-up locations for the items contained in the plan and quantities per item are summarized in the table below.

<i>Location</i>	<i>Combat ration packs (packs)</i>	<i>Fuel (l)</i>	<i>Water (l)</i>	<i>Oil 50 (l)</i>	<i>Grease (kg)</i>	<i>Coolant (l)</i>
Bamako	40 500	593 700	–	7 300	780	840
Gao	2 500	40 000	–	1 000	120	120
Sévaré	–	–	64 000	–	120	120
Total	43 000	633 700	64 000	8 300	1 020	1 080

Engineering support

42. In December, the Joint Force requested support from MINUSMA to establish temporary structures for its new headquarters on land allocated by the Government of Mali in Bamako. Permanent structures will be erected by a European Union contractor. The temporary structures would enable the Force's leadership to relocate to the new location immediately while the procurement process for the permanent structure is under way. MINUSMA responded favourably to the request. A contract was awarded to a commercial contractor on 30 March for work related to the project. Work on the site began on 1 April and is projected to be completed within the coming weeks.

Casualty evacuation and transport

43. MINUSMA performed one casualty evacuation during the reporting period, on 30 March. In addition, it provided transport for one G5 Sahel liaison officer, who was transported on a MINUSMA flight from Bamako to Gao. He will help to handle logistics and coordinate casualty evacuation requests for the G5 Sahel on Malian territory.

Issues and challenges

44. To date, MINUSMA has responded favourably to 43 of the Joint Force's 45 requests. On average, it processes support requests from the Force in less than 10 days, including human rights due diligence clearance. In order to ensure the timely processing of the Force's requests, the Mission has made the arrangements necessary to position life support at the pre-agreed collection points within 48 to 72 hours of receipt of a request, while awaiting clearance regarding the human rights due diligence policy.

45. Nevertheless, the Joint Force's limited logistical, transport and storage capabilities highlight the limits of the current support model. Although MINUSMA has made efforts to prepare and make available life support at its main operating bases in response to requests from the Force, the latter has often been unable to collect deliveries or has been able to collect only a portion of the supplies requested. Given the low collection and consumption rate, the Mission has also had to make arrangements to return uncollected ration packs to its warehouses before they reached their expiration date and to avoid waste, as rations are distributed on a first-in, first-out basis. This has made planning challenging. Following a request by the Force and in order to facilitate collection, MINUSMA agreed in February to position deliveries within bases closer to the Force's area of operations, namely in Ansongo and Douentza. In accordance with the technical arrangement, and on the condition that it would neither delay nor have a negative impact on the Mission's capacity to deliver on its core mandated tasks or on its supply chains or other resources, MINUSMA could assess the possibility of delivering life support consumables to other locations in Mali jointly agreed upon with the Force.

46. Following the tripartite meeting held on 19 December referred to in paragraph 24, and at the request of the Joint Force and the European Union, the United Nations explored the possibility of delivering life support, through external contractors in the G5 Sahel countries, directly to each of the Force's battalions. However, given that the Security Council stipulated in paragraph 39 of its resolution 2480 (2019) that life support consumables could be provided by MINUSMA to Force contingents operating outside Mali on the condition that the Force or other partners assumed responsibility for ensuring delivery to their respective areas of operations when outside Malian territory, and given that the resolution excludes the use of commercial entities, such a step would require changes to the mandate and subsequently the tripartite technical arrangement. Beyond such legal and technical considerations, the impact on the Mission's ability to implement its two strategic priorities would need to be carefully assessed.

B. Multilateral support

47. At the international high-level conference on the Sahel, held in 2018, the European Union, its member States and other countries pledged €88 million in support of the Joint Force, in addition to previous contributions, bringing all pledges received to date to approximately €431.6 million.

48. The European Union and some of its member States continued to support the operationalization of the Joint Force, including through a contribution of €183.2 million for the provision of equipment, services and infrastructure to the Force through Expertise France. During the reporting period, urgently required telecommunications equipment was delivered to the Force, as were 46 armoured vehicles and counter-improvised-explosive equipment, along with training on the use and maintenance of the vehicles and equipment.

V. Resource mobilization and coordination efforts: coordination hub, trust fund for the Joint Force and support committee

49. The most recent plenary session of the European Union coordination hub was held in Brussels on 17 December. It marked the official transfer of the hub from Brussels to Nouakchott, as previously agreed. In order to facilitate the transition, the regional advisory coordination cell of the European Union in Nouakchott will provide assistance to the support committee of the trust fund for the Joint Force, which now manages the hub.

50. In order to keep donors informed of the operationalization of the Joint Force, it was agreed that the support committee would present the results of its coordination work in Brussels every six months. The first presentation had been scheduled for 26 May, but, owing to the COVID-19 outbreak, was postponed to the second half of 2020.

VI. Observations

51. I am deeply concerned about the devastating surge in the number of terrorist attacks targeting civilians and security forces in the Sahel region. The intensifying violence along community lines, with alarming humanitarian consequences, is also of great concern. In Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger, the number of people who have died in terrorist attacks has increased five-fold since 2016, with more than 4,000

deaths reported in 2019 alone, compared with an estimated 770 in 2016. The mounting number of displaced persons is equally disturbing. In Burkina Faso alone, it has increased ten-fold, to about 500,000, in addition to the 25,000 who have sought refuge in neighbouring countries. The dire situation in the region is further compounded by the spread of COVID-19 in Africa, with terrorist groups exploiting it for both propaganda and action purposes, which has the potential to have a grave impact on the region.

52. Owing to the convergence of global security, climate and COVID-19 threats in the region, compounded by complex local dynamics, exceptional solidarity is required at the international, regional and national levels. Governments, local actors, regional organizations and the international community are mobilizing throughout West Africa and the Sahel to respond to terrorism and violent extremism. A robust, coherent and integrated approach to security, humanitarian and development challenges is needed to reverse current negative trends in the Sahel in general and in Mali in particular. I welcome the renewed commitment made by the Heads of State of the G5 Sahel and the President of France at their summit in Pau and at the sixth Conference of Heads of State of the G5 Sahel in Nouakchott to join forces to counter terrorism, curb organized crime and tackle the root causes of instability. The establishment of the Coalition for the Sahel to coordinate international engagement is an important step to strengthen coordination among key actors in the Sahel. The European Union remains a key partner, and its continued support will remain pivotal to ensure the full operationalization of the Joint Force. However, any effective response in the Sahel requires the commitment of the wider subregion. In that context, I welcome the adoption on 21 December of an action plan to eradicate terrorism for the period 2020–2024 by the Authority of Heads of State and Government of ECOWAS.

53. It takes a variety of actors to confront the daunting challenges in the region, and thus there is a need for stronger coordination between forces and clarity with regard to command and control. I call upon all partners to take urgent steps to enhance coordination, information exchange and, where applicable, mutual support. Transparency is the keystone of any successful and mutually beneficial partnership, and I urge all stakeholders to work together to ensure a coherent and coordinated response. This will also be important to gain the trust of local populations. I remain grateful to all donors who have contributed generously to the trust fund for the Joint Force and I encourage others to follow suit. My gratitude goes also to my Special Representative for Mali, Mahamat Saleh Annadif, and MINUSMA staff and personnel. They have made every effort to respond swiftly and favourably to all requests for support from the Force with maximum flexibility and in compliance with their mandate and the human rights due diligence policy, while at the same time implementing a range of mandated activities and supporting the COVID-19 response. This flexibility has been particularly notable in the Mission's efforts to ensure the supply of support for the Force in areas such as Sévaré, near Boulekessi, and Ménaka, near the tri-border area. I should also like to underscore the critical role that MINUSMA continues to play in support of the peace process in Mali and the stabilization of centre of the country, both of which are prerequisites for lasting peace and stability in the region.

54. The increase in the operational tempo of the Joint Force is encouraging. I pay tribute to the efforts and sacrifices of its personnel and all other security forces who continue to operate under extremely difficult circumstances and at great personal risk. The Force remains a vital part of a series of regional and international security responses to address extremist armed groups in the region, along with other cross-border challenges, including trafficking in persons, illicit goods, weapons and drugs; migration; and displacement. The complementarity and partnership of current

mechanisms are critical, as the Force alone cannot secure the Sahel. In that regard, I welcome the Force's partnership with French forces and the creation of Task Force Takuba, which will deploy European special forces as part of Operation Barkhane. The decision of the African Union to develop a framework for the possible deployment of a regional counter-terrorism force, composed of the Multinational Joint Task Force and 3,000 additional troops, attests to the commitment of the African Union to stepping up its contribution to combating terrorism in the Sahel. In that context, it will be important to enhance existing joint security mechanisms, such as the Joint Force and the Multinational Joint Task Force of the Lake Chad Basin Commission.

55. Since the establishment of the Joint Force, I have advocated an ambitious mandate and the provision of predictable and sustained funding for it. I have taken note of its concerns regarding the limited efficiency of the current support model and the difficulties that its contingents operating outside Mali are facing in collecting life support consumables provided by MINUSMA at the designated collection points in Mali. As requested by the Security Council, my next report on MINUSMA will provide an assessment of the implementation of the provisions of paragraph 13 of resolution [2391 \(2017\)](#) and related challenges, as well as options on the way forward.

56. I commend the G5 Sahel States on the steps taken to adhere to the human rights and international humanitarian law compliance framework, which is a critical tool and an innovative approach. Adherence to the framework is vital to ensuring that measures to prevent and counter violent extremism are respectful of human rights. If counter-terrorism operations compound the fear and divisiveness that turn people against one another, they risk inadvertently undermining one of humanity's most effective defences. I reiterate my call for timely investigations into all allegations of violations by units of the Joint Force. Such investigations will contribute to strengthening the Force's credibility and its acceptance by populations. In an increasingly complex environment, respect for humanitarian principles is equally essential. I urge Governments, State and non-State armed groups and other stakeholders to uphold their obligations under international humanitarian law and to ensure unimpeded humanitarian access to populations most in need.
