



## MEETING OF NON-STATE ACTORS ON SECURITY IN ECOWAS

Niamey, 26 – 27 August 2019

### CONCEPT NOTE

#### **I – Background and Justification**

1. The scourge of terrorism, accompanied with violent extremism and insecurity, and the unprecedented rate at which it spreads, have become a major source of concern globally and particularly in the ECOWAS region. Indeed terrorist attacks, shown to have an adverse effect on the economies and social fabric of the affected countries, have become even more devastating than previous threats. Initially occurring within the same area, the attacks have increased and threaten to destroy more countries in its wake, by moving towards the South and the coast.
2. The West African region faces attacks from groups such as Boko Haram, West African Province of the Islamic State (WAPIS), which operate in the Lake Chad basin, Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims (GSIM) and the Islamic State in the Grand Sahara (EIGS), as well as Ansarul Islam in the Sahel. According to UN sources, there were 450 terrorist attacks in 2019 alone.
3. The ECOWAS Early Warning and Response Network has estimated that in ten years of subversive activities, Boko Haram attacks alone have led to more than 27,000 deaths and 3 million displaced persons. Over 2,168 terrorism-related incidents occurred in the region from 2015 to 2019, causing more than 11,538 deaths over the 4-year period.
4. In addition, inter-communal clashes have become a growing and worrying trend in West Africa. They are fuelled and manipulated by terrorists and occur as cyclic conflicts and reprisal attacks. Inter-communal and inter-ethnic clashes have increased in recent years. The manipulation of these clashes in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, and the increase in attacks against churches in Burkina Faso, constitute

new mutations of terrorism in the Sahel. The clashes have worsened and occasioned more victims than the terrorist attacks since 2018. As an illustration, there were over 600 incidents linked to inter-communal clashes compared to 550 terrorism-related incidents in 2018.

5. Terrorism and inter-communal clashes are the major human security threats in the sub-region today. The trend is alarming and on the rise. Terrorist attacks rose by 150%, while inter-communal clashes increased by 900% (that is, tenfold) between 2015 and 2019.

6. While the inter-communal clashes in the Lake Chad basin, particularly Nigeria, are mainly transhumance-related farmer-herder clashes, those in the Sahel are today the result of ethnic manipulation. Terrorist attacks target groups of people with a shared identity, causing the stigmatisation of the ethnic group. These attack-revenge inter-communal clashes lead to reprisals by the community under attack against the community suspected to have carried out the attack.

7. The creation of two terrorist groups: Amadou Koufa's Macina Liberation Front in Mali and Malam Ibrahim Dicko's Ansarul Islam in Burkina Faso is symptomatic of the withdrawal along community and identity lines in the Sahel. Similarly, many self-defence<sup>1</sup> groups and militias have been created in recent years in several countries, with the aim of “defending their identity”, “their community” and “their people”.

8. Nigeria experienced the highest number of inter-communal clashes between 2015 and 2019, the peak being in 2018 with over 500 incidents, followed by Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger. In Mali, ECOWARN recorded several incidents. The most recent is the reprisal attack carried out in Gangafari and Yoro on 18 June 2019, which caused the death of 38 people in the country’s central region. As a reminder, 164 people were killed on 23 March 2019 in Ogossagou village of Mali. Due to the intense emotion generated by this incident, a high-level ECOWAS mission was despatched to Mali.

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<sup>1</sup> Examples of self-defence groups: Sahel Salvation Alliance (ASS), Dana Amassagou, l’Alliance nationale pour la sauvegarde de l’identité peule et la restauration de la justice, Vigilante Groups, Yan Banga, Yan Sa Kai and Kato da Gora, MACBAN...

9. The worrying situation has caused a humanitarian emergency<sup>2</sup> due to the large number of displaced persons, including 312,000 people in crisis or food emergency situations in Central Mali, according to OCHA estimates. 10 million people are threatened by food insecurity and over 13 million people in need in the region. Internally displaced persons and refugees are estimated at about 2,500,000 and 240,000 respectively. The severity and tragic nature of the crisis have contributed to the high number of deaths, directly resulting from famine, and a high incidence of malnutrition affecting up to 400,000 children.

10. Given the situation and the increase in terrorism and clashes, the meeting of ECOWAS Heads of State held in June 2019 expressed grave concern, particularly at the growing link between terrorism and inter-communal clashes, including transhumance-related conflicts, which raise questions on the impact of climate change. The conflicts were frequent in Nigeria, Mali, Niger and more recently, Togo.

11. Recently, there has been a trend of targeting religious figures and places of worship. Another worrying aspect of terrorism is the growing link between drug and human trafficking, crime and organised crime in general, a matter over which the Heads of State also expressed concern in June 2019.

12. Given the growing threat of terrorism, inter-community violence and violent extremism in general, and taking into account the cross-border nature of the threat, a collective and trans-national response involving all stakeholders – State actors or otherwise – should be adopted to address the issue. To this end, the ECOWAS Commission is organising this stakeholders' meeting ahead of the ECOWAS Summit on counter terrorism expected to take place in Burkina Faso in September 2019. The Extraordinary Summit of Heads of State and Government on counter-terrorism, will be the culmination of a multi-level preparatory process. The process will start with the meeting of non-State actors on 26 and 27 August 2019, followed by a meeting of the defence and security forces responsible for counter-terrorism on 28 and 29 August, and the meetings of the Council of Ministers and the Heads of State and Government in September 2019. The multi-level preparatory process is based on the premise that all levels and sectors of the society, government and non-government, from civil society to political, military, security, social and economic actors in the countries of the region, have a crucial role to play in the

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<sup>2</sup> OCHA, CILSS, ECOWARN

overall security offensive. The first two meetings are expected to lead to relevant and practical recommendations on the fight against terrorism and violent extremism which will be submitted to the Council of Ministers and the Summit.

13. This Concept Note focuses on the first of these two preparatory meetings, that is, the Civil Society and Stakeholders' meeting. The event is being held at a time when there is a constant focus on military approaches and solutions. The trend is illustrated by arrangements such as the G5 Sahel Force and the Multinational Joint Task Force (MJTF).

14. In addition to being a serious threat to peace and security in West Africa, terrorism/violent extremism fundamentally hinders the efforts of the region's leaders and people to promote and consolidate socio-economic development. Indeed, the fight against terrorism and violent extremism is currently one of the top priorities of the region's leaders. This was illustrated by the recent meeting of ECOWAS Heads of State and Government held on 29 June 2019, during which the Heads of State reaffirmed their unwavering commitment to promoting peace and security in the region, recognising it as a prerequisite for the integration and economic development.

15. Expressing solidarity and deploring the phenomenon, ECOWAS Heads of State further called for an extraordinary summit on terrorism, in order to "review the various initiatives taken to date and, consequently, redefine the priority areas of intervention needed to contain the spread of terrorist attacks in the region". In doing so, the Summit in line with the renewed sense of urgency that has emerged in the region for rapid and collective regional action against terrorism.

16. The sense of urgency was illustrated by the directive given by the mini-Summit of 22 February 2019 to the ECOWAS Commission, to organise a Summit of Heads of State on counter-terrorism. Also known as the Accra initiative, it builds on previous regional responses, which have focused mainly on military collaboration and cooperation, such as the G5 Sahel Force and the Multinational Joint Task Force (MJTF) for the Lake Chad region.

17. At the international level, there is an approach focused on the application of the rule of law whereby, for example, the United Nations has instituted an ongoing ICC investigation into crimes allegedly committed since January 2012, in the context of the conflict in northern Mali. In addition, the Government of Mali has

requested an investigation following the unprecedented attack on civilians in Ogossagou. In addition, MINUSMA has issued a preliminary report on alleged human rights violations which could be deemed to be crimes against humanity if it is proven that they were systematically or indiscriminately committed against civilians. On July 26, the American government announced that it would punish individuals responsible for terrorist activities in Mali, including drug trafficking. It should be recalled that at the regional level, the mini-Summit held in Accra called for the establishment of a judicial extradition mechanism.

18. The meeting is being organised in against the backdrop of growing interest, at the regional and international levels, for a holistic approach that allows the military approach to be deployed alongside non-military responses. The new interest in a holistic approach has gained ground, as it has become clear that military interventions and those based on the rule of law alone are insufficient to address the underlying political, economic, social and cultural factors of terrorism and violent extremism.

19. There are a number of non-military approaches that could be used effectively to complement military approaches, one of the main ones being the use of community-based mechanisms. Community methods have shown that they are much better placed to take preventive measures and deal with post-attack situations. To begin with, they have a comparative advantage resulting from their geographical proximity and a better understanding of the cultural and social dynamics that often give rise to collective grievances. In addition, as direct victims of extremism and conflict within their communities, communities have a critical voice in crisis prevention and management.

20. Similarly, women leaders have the ability to play an important role in mobilising communities. Women's diverse role as mothers, sisters, wives and social leaders offers them a strong platform to influence social outcomes at different levels. This is particularly true with respect to their roles as agents of socialisation and champions of traditional, cultural and religious values. They also contribute the psychological and social well-being of children and young people, through their special ability to detect and shape the attitudes of young people who are likely to be swayed by terrorist ideology. This helps to address early signs of radicalisation and extremism from the home. Women have a deep and intuitive understanding of factors that can affect the choices of their children.

21. Community, traditional and religious leaders also play an important leadership role within their communities. This is essential for dialogue and engagement with young people on issues regarding religious belief, culture and radical thinking. The aim is to forestall radicalisation and involvement of young people in acts of terrorism and extreme violence. They are also in a position to act as bridges between their communities and the State, in particular to relay crucial information from individual to government and vice versa. Engagement with communities provides a platform to understand and address the concerns raised by citizens. To effectively counter terrorism or violent extremism, there is a need for an inclusive dialogue and partnership between States and civil society. As bridge builders, community leaders are thus crucial in any inclusive approach to combat terrorism and violent extremism.

22. In communities, such partnerships imply raising awareness and providing support for non-state actors such as women, community, religious and traditional leaders, and law enforcement officers, who work together to solve these issues. These non-state actors play a crucial role in providing the necessary support for young people in the communities. This laudable task of raising awareness and providing support for non-state actors is being carried out by local NGOs/CSOs that physically present in the affected areas. Sections of the international community also provide material and financial support. Civic and anti-terrorist education, as part of a broader process of education for peace and formal education through special programmes at all levels and throughout the region aimed at shaping young people's attitudes, should be instituted to facilitate the consolidation of cultural and religious values linked to ethnic and religious tolerance that have been embedded in traditional African culture for centuries. There is also a need to carefully examine the use of the Internet and social media to promote radicalisation and extremist tendencies.

23. Efforts should also be made to encourage and support vocational training with a view to addressing youth unemployment and promoting inclusion in order to equip young people with the means of accessing employment opportunities, particularly through the private sector. There is also a need to focus on inclusive economic and social development to provide basic facilities such as health services and schools. Just as the creation of a favourable investment climate is to the advantage of all actors, who are expected to contribute to the fight, so also

post-conflict reconstruction and conflict prevention in communities and countries remain the responsibility of all stakeholders.

24. It is equally important that ECOWAS Member States implement the respective strategies they have already adopted in the field of terrorism, in particular the Counter-Terrorism Strategy and its Implementation Plan. With regard to socio-economic tools to combat terrorism, another approach would be to promote sustainable development policies, in line with the instruments adopted by the countries of the region at regional, continental and international levels, namely the ECOWAS Vision 2020, the ECOWAS Sahel Strategy, the African Union Agenda 2063 and the United Nations Agenda 2030. The implementation of good governance practices such as the consolidation of democratic systems and respect for human rights would also be beneficial.

25. In addition to the lack of resources to address the humanitarian and military aspect, a worrisome pattern is that many affected countries, which already face limited resources, are compelled to allocate more than a third of their national resources to the fight against terrorism, thereby cutting down on the resources needed for development. In that regard, there is a need to develop innovative strategies for sustainable resource mobilisation in order to build peace and security in the region on a solid foundation, in addition to the assistance from traditional partners that has become inadequate. Furthermore, the African Union has called on the United Nations Security Council to promote the allocation of resources to combat terrorism in Africa. Accordingly, at its last session, the ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State welcomed the efforts being made by individual Member States at the national level, particularly by "allocating of considerable financial resources to prevent and combat terrorism, which however increase their level of indebtedness". In that regard, the Authority instructed the President of the ECOWAS Commission to facilitate dialogue with international financial institutions such that security spending is seen as investment for development.

26. Finally, there is a need to encourage the international community to further support programmes and activities at the community level, as set out above, so that they can be maintained and even expanded. In the light of the foregoing, it has become imperative to consider other strategies and explore a more coordinated and holistic approach to forging strong partnerships between local communities, governments, humanitarian and development partners for sustained improvement in the region's security situation.

## **II – General and Specific Objectives**

**General objective:** The purpose of the meeting is to receive suggestions and recommendations from non-state actors, and raise awareness and involve them in regional security matters, particularly with regard to the fight against terrorism and inter-communal clashes, to ensure lasting peace in the region.

**In specific terms,** the objectives of the meetings are to:

- Apprise non-state actors of the security situation and emerging threats (terrorism, herder-farmer conflicts, identity crises, etc.) in the region,
- Share experiences with respect to conflict resolution, particularly inter-communal dialogue, mediation and other conflict prevention and resolution mechanisms,
- Outline the achievements and enhance the cooperation and commitment of each non-state actor (women, youth, traditional and religious leaders, media,...) in the fight against terrorism and inter-communal clashes,
- Assess the initiatives for the promotion of peace (education for peace, CVE, de-radicalisation, DDR, Sahel strategy,...) and draw the necessary lessons to ensure the effectiveness of projects and programmes for prevention and transition from conflict to peace,
- Provide an update on funding and explore available funding opportunities with regard to the fight against terrorism and conflict,
- Review the current state of potential resources (human and technical) available for the promotion of peace and security, counter-terrorism and inter-communal clashes, and mobilise stakeholders (TFP, private sector, philanthropists, etc.) for their participation in the financing and mobilisation of various resources to address the situation.

## **III –Priority Themes**

To achieve the objectives of the meeting, the discussions will be conducted in plenary and panel sessions, led by moderators. The general and specific context outlining the security situation in plenary will be the focus of a main presentation, providing an overview of the security situation in the region. The recommendations for priority actions resulting from the meeting will be considered in working groups and the reports presented in plenary. Discussions on the themes will be conducted



in panel, followed by an interactive session between participants and panelists. The themes are as follows:

- **Session 1** : Engagement/Role of different stakeholders in the fight against terrorism and communal conflicts - *role of women, youth in peace-building, role of the media in raising awareness and public education, religious leaders in peace-building and peacekeeping, traditional rulers in mediation/ and conflict management,*
- **Session 2**: Inter-communal dialogue as a tool for conflict prevention, management and resolution (terrorism, inter-communal clashes, herder-farmer conflicts...);
- **Session 3**: Lessons learned from the fight against terrorism and community conflicts (from conflict to peace) - i.e.: *education for peace, national and international best practices, CVE, DDR, de-radicalisation, youth employment and job creation, dialogue and mediation initiatives, ECOWAS Sahel strategy, peace building and reconciliation initiatives, community-based initiatives*
- **Session 4**: Herder-farmer conflicts and proposed solutions for an effective ECOWAS strategy;
- **Session 5**: Mobilisation of resources (human, technical, material, financial) and partners for a sustained fight against terrorism and community conflicts.

## **V – Expected Outcome**

At the end of the workshops, the participants are expected to have:

- Better understanding of the security situation and the risk factors for conflicts, including violent extremism and communal clashes, and recommendations to combat terrorism, resolve conflicts and promote a culture of peace in Member States,
- Better understanding of existing roles, resources and peace initiatives to combat terrorism in order to help the non-state actors to build on them to achieve peace,

- Greater readiness and capacity for dialogue and collaboration among stakeholders, and with the relevant public bodies, communities and civil society organisations, in order to collectively fight against extremism and inter-communal conflicts in Member States,
- A priority action plan on counter-terrorism, for the consideration of the Council of Ministers prior to the Summit of Heads of State.