

Distinguished Representatives of the G5 Countries and of the Member States of the Sahel Alliance,

*Italy is fully committed to the **stability of the Sahel region: fighting against terrorism and promoting sustainable development strategies** represent our priorities.*

*We are deeply concerned over the **deterioration of the political and security framework in the Sahel region** and reject the use of force as a tool for the seizure of power. However, a strong and **articulated commitment of the European Union in the area** should be maintained, providing a strong support for the "**civilian surge**".*

*Our efforts to address the security challenges in the region have to be supported by **initiatives to protect the most vulnerable people, enhance the role of communities**, strengthen their resilience against violent extremism, develop early warning mechanisms and, above all, **promote their ownership**. We need a holistic approach, **combining security and civilian efforts**, with prevention playing a pivotal role in this context.*

*The **good governance principle** should guide our collective efforts. Strengthening local institutions and enhancing the effectiveness of basic services to the benefit of the populations*

represent **key actions to build peace and democracy in Africa**. In this framework, and in the context of our action throughout Africa to build stronger communities, **with a special focus on women and youth**, let me mention the positive example of the Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund - **GCERF and of its Sahel program**. The results achieved by GCERF, working with local communities and civil society, are remarkable, and we are proud to support it.

The Sahel represents a priority area for the Italian Development Cooperation - with **85 projects financed for a total value of 156 million euros**. We joined the Sahel Alliance in 2018 and we fully support its mandate. In order to confirm this support, we have just recently approved a **hundred thousand euro financial contribution to the Alliance Coordination Unit**.

In light of the deteriorating humanitarian crisis in Sahel, Italy has also increased the **humanitarian aid** to alleviate the suffering of the **most vulnerable groups**, with special attention to issues such as gender, disability and education and the protection of women in conflict situations.

We, members of the Sahel Alliance, should increase our efforts to support an increased participation of young people and women in peace processes and in political life, especially in Sahel.

Youth should be at the center of our development actions.
Young people are a vital driver for peace, change and prosperity.

Last but not least, also thinking to the economic and social impact of the war in Ukraine, let me just recall the importance of the **Matera Declaration** launched by the Italian G20 Presidency also for the Sahel region. Food security and sustainable food systems are key to ending hunger, encouraging social cohesion, reducing socio-economic inequalities, promoting inclusive global economic growth and sustainable development.

Thank you for your attention.