

Declaration of the Sahel Alliance - General Assembly**Madrid – 4th April 2022**

We, the representatives of the members of the Sahel Alliance, convened in Madrid on 4th April 2022 the third Sahel Alliance General Assembly. This meeting allowed us to take stock of the achievements of the Alliance in 2021. We also agreed on the strategic orientations that will allow us, in a complex political and security context, to ensure the continuity and strengthening of our actions, for the benefit of the sustainable improvement of the living conditions of the Sahelian populations and in line with the development priorities of our G5 Sahel partners. We welcome the accession of Sweden, Canada and the United States as full members of the Sahel Alliance in 2021, which reflects the increased representativeness of the Alliance and integration within itself.

The Sahel Alliance brings together a total of 26 bilateral and multilateral development partners (17 full members and 9 observers) and now constitutes a central framework for the coordination of development cooperation initiatives in the Sahel. Although the Sahel is a region replete with potential and opportunities, it also faces major challenges.

The members of the Sahel Alliance express their deep concern about the multiple political crises and democratic backsliding, the deteriorating security situation, the growing humanitarian crises and the worrying situation for human rights in several G5 Sahel countries. The G5 as an institution is going through a difficult time. Several areas of the Sahel are experiencing increasing conflict and tension. Nearly 2.5 million people have left their homes in the last decade. Some 6.7 million people are in need of emergency food assistance, a figure that could rise to 10.5 million if urgent action is not taken. This already critical situation is compounded by the unprecedented impact of the war in Ukraine on the global seeds and fertiliser market for the supply of countries and assistance to food-insecure households. Furthermore, the Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated the economic, health and nutritional vulnerabilities that people were already facing.

Significant progress still needs to be made on education, with a youth literacy rate that remains low¹ and the increasing number of school closures due to insecurity². The very low rate of access to electricity (28%) reveals strong territorial inequalities, particularly in rural areas. The challenges related to access to basic services are aggravated by the region's strong demographic growth, which is the highest in Africa (+3% on average per year). Finally, the questioning of the constitutional order and the uncertainties surrounding the political transitions in three G5 Sahel states (Mali, Burkina Faso, Chad) are increasingly destabilising factors that undermine the prospects for achieving a civil and political surge.

The exacerbation of crisis factors and this instability both jeopardise efforts that have been expended and development gains that may have been achieved. The members of the Sahel Alliance therefore reaffirm their determination to remain committed to the Sahelian populations, as shown by the new increase in the portfolio of funded projects: since the launch of the Alliance in 2017, the number of projects funded has tripled, as well as the financial commitments (from 7.3 to 23 billion euros). They recall the importance of acting on the root causes of instability, including through strengthening adaptation to climate change, resilience, democratic governance, food security, gender equality, vocational training and the socio-

¹ 57% in 2018 compared to 76.5% on average for sub-Saharan Africa

² Between April 2017 and December 2019, Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger saw a six-fold increase in the number of closed schools

economic integration of youth. There will be no peace and stability in the Sahel without a profound and qualitative change in the living conditions of the Sahelian people.

Finally, the General Assembly is being held in Madrid because of the exceptional circumstances facing the G5 Sahel as an institution. A rapid resolution of the difficulties encountered is essential if the Alliance is to continue to strengthen the dialogue and close relations with this privileged partner for cooperation in the Sahel.

We, members of the Sahel Alliance, recognise:

1. *The need to strengthen the overall partnership framework within which our actions are carried out to adapt them to the evolving contexts of intervention*

Throughout the past year, high-level exchanges with partners and field missions in the G5 Sahel countries have continued. These various meetings, along with the systematic participation of the G5 Sahel representatives in the meetings of the Alliance's governance bodies, have helped to establish a constant and open dialogue with the G5 Sahel. The Alliance members are committed to support regional dialogue and the formulation of the new G5 Sahel Development and Security Strategy (SDS), as well as its future operational application, which shall be the Priority Investment Programme (PIP). They also agreed to set up a framework for exchanges with the G5 Sahel countries in order to strengthen the dialogue on public policies and priority sectoral reforms, and to improve the impact of development cooperation, in a spirit of transparency and mutual accountability. A pilot exercise funded by the UK has been launched in Niger, which will focus on girls' education and retention in school.

Relations between the Secretariats of the G5 Sahel, the Sahel Coalition, the Sahel Alliance and the Partnership for Security and Stability in the Sahel (P3S) have been strengthened and formalised, within the overall umbrella of the Coalition. Within this broad framework of cooperation, it is essential that a good mode of cooperation is established between the different pillars and initiatives, while preserving the autonomy of each entity. The members of the Sahel Alliance call for stronger links between short-term stabilisation actions and long-term development actions and for the further implementation of the Integrated Territorial Approach (ATI) in close collaboration with the P3S. They will contribute to the revision of the N'Djamena Roadmap decided at the Sahel Coalition Ministerial on 9th March 2022 and will advocate, in this context, for a strengthening and greater inclusiveness of the monitoring mechanism of the commitments, so to ensure the full involvement of Pillar 4 / development.

Climate change and its effects such as extreme weather events, increased rainfall variability and soil degradation are having heavy impacts on the Sahel, exacerbating vulnerabilities and tensions and affecting the livelihoods of populations, particularly in rural areas. The members of the Sahel Alliance are concerned by the deteriorating humanitarian situation and recognise the necessity of further strengthening and coordinating their support to meet the urgent nutritional needs of populations and to make local food production systems more sustainable, in a logic of adaptation and resilience to climate change and exogenous shocks. In the annexed declaration, the Sahel Alliance and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification commit, within the framework of the Great Green Wall Initiative, to common objectives and the pooling of efforts for a resilient, sustainable agriculture that creates economic opportunities.

Finally, the members of the Sahel Alliance intend to strengthen their partnership with civil society and local actors, to ensure that the needs and expectations expressed by the populations are properly understood and considered and to take into account the deterioration of their perception toward external support. In this respect, they are committed to strengthening the partnership-based approach, inclusiveness and co-construction of their interventions with the

populations. They also undertake to increase the transparency and accountability of their interventions towards the Sahelian populations.

2. The need to strengthen our collective action in prevention zones, while maintaining our support in the most vulnerable areas

The members of the Sahel Alliance recall the central and innovative nature of the Integrated Territorial Approach (ATI), which aims to respond to the most urgent needs of populations and to address the root causes of fragility in vulnerable areas. Integrated, multisectoral and adapted to the specificities and constraints of each territory, the ATI is implemented in close coordination with the concerned authorities in each selected priority area, which are both crisis and prevention zones. It is a reference coordination framework for development actors and their partners (national, regional and local) as well as security, humanitarian and stabilisation actors and a preferred means of increasing the coherence, relevance and effectiveness of our interventions, while preserving the independent mandates of each actor.

The Alliance members welcome the progress made in the operationalisation of the ATI, as exemplified by what was achieved in Mauritania. The organisation of the “Néma round table” is a very concrete illustration of what the ATI can accomplish: chaired by the Mauritanian Prime Minister, it demonstrated the members’ capacity to speak with one voice and under a single banner and to mobilise strongly to support in a coordinated and coherent way the local development strategy of a priority area, the Hodh el Chargui. In Mali as well, the implementation of the ATI is particularly advanced, with the establishment of specific consultation frameworks in the priority areas (North, Centre and South). Given the current crisis situation in Mali, the ATI is a framework that could enable the continued implementation of development actions for the benefit of the population, in particular in terms of delivery of basic services.

The presence of the State and the provision of basic services in the territories of the G5 Sahel countries, the restoration of social cohesion and the trust of citizens in their public institutions, remain an absolute priority. The members of the Sahel Alliance have continued to mobilise strongly in 2021 to implement the projects of the G5 Sahel Emergency Development Programme (PDU), which targets fragile border regions. These projects fully contribute to the objectives of the civilian surge: provision of essential services, strengthening of the resilience of vulnerable populations, restoration or consolidation of social ties. As highlighted in the annexed note, the PDU has shown convincing results, with a disbursement rate much higher than usual (40%) despite particularly difficult intervention contexts. New phases of funded projects are already being appraised or implemented, allowing an almost doubling (513 million euros to date) of the amount initially mobilised and reflecting the willingness of the Alliance members to strengthen their support to this G5 Sahel programme.

The members of the Sahel Alliance welcome the operationalisation of the G5 Sahel Facility, a new multi-donor financial instrument, jointly developed by BMZ and SEG5 and based on ATI principles, which allows for rapid and flexible action in vulnerable contexts. Members are encouraged to support this Facility alongside Germany and France. In Mali, the first project financed by the Facility is already being implemented, a call for projects was launched in Mauritania (Hodh-el-Chargui priority area) and calls for projects will be launched very soon in the other G5 Sahel countries.

Recent political and security developments in the G5 Sahel region call for increased attention to prevention areas. The members of the Sahel Alliance are committed to stepping up their efforts, especially in terms of the provision of essential services, economic and employment opportunities, restoration of social cohesion, prevention and community conflicts management

in these areas, in order to prevent the risk of them plunging into a crisis situation. Particular attention should also be paid to fragile border areas between the G5 Sahel countries and the coastal countries of the Gulf of Guinea. The Alliance's members take note of the commitment made by the signatory States of the Paris Declaration of 17th February 2022³, reiterated in the Sahel Coalition' Ministerial Declaration adopted on 9th March 2022, to continue their joint action to fight against insecurity in the Sahel and its fringes by addressing the root causes of insecurity in the region. In order to limit the expansion of conflicts and terrorist threats to the Southern and Western periphery of the Sahel, the members of the Alliance will consider strengthening their support to the northern areas of the Gulf of Guinea countries, in a logic of cross-border prevention. Lastly, the members of the Sahel Alliance call for special attention to be paid to urban dynamics in the Sahel, which do not generate the expected dividends in terms of job creation and wealth and can result in strong destabilisation. In addition to the capitals, secondary cities constitute a key territorial network for limiting the spread of conflicts and crises, particularly those located in cross-border areas.

3. The importance of gender equality and the defence of the rights of women and girls for inclusive development in the Sahel

The members commit to pursuing their efforts towards increased participation and empowerment of women in politics, transition processes and conflict prevention and resolution, within the framework of UNSCR 1325 and the broader UN Women, Peace and Security Agenda. They recognise that gender equality is one of the strongest drivers for inclusive growth and long-term prosperity. The members support the development of innovative approaches that respond to the priorities of this agenda, such as the "Minka Fund - Peace and Resilience" dedicated to peace building, the "Sahel Youth" partnership network or programmes dedicated to strengthening women's leadership capacities, such as the "Ellas+" thematic fund or the "RAISA" programme. The members advocate for full and effective gender mainstreaming in the development strategies of the G5S countries and undertake to support their efforts to strengthen the economic and political empowerment of women, their access to income-generating activities and to social protection. Lastly, they recognise the G5 Sahel Women's Platform as a key partner for the promotion of gender equality actions in the G5S countries, with which collaboration could be usefully strengthened.

4. The need to significantly scale up efforts and support for Sahelian youth

In a region where young people under the age of 30 represent almost 65% of the population, the members of the Sahel Alliance recognise the imperative to invest more in the potential of Sahelian youth. In the annexed declaration, they call for increased mobilisation in the sectors of education, vocational training and employment, better coordination and adaptation of interventions and an increase in public spending in these sectors, which is an essential prerequisite for the implementation of policies and reforms in favour of access to education for all. They support the recommendations of the Sahel Education White Paper, launched by the World Bank and the G5 Sahel Heads of State, in particular those contained in the Nouakchott Declaration signed by all the G5 Sahel countries, as well as the conclusions of the "Education in Emergency contexts" workshop organised by the Alliance's coordination group dedicated to education and youth employability, in relation to UN Security Council Resolution 2601 on safety in schools.

The members of the Sahel Alliance also want to give young people in the Sahel a greater voice through initiatives created "by, with and for" young people, such as the OIF's Radio Jeunesse

³ Joint declaration on the fight against the terrorist threat and the support to peace and security in the Sahel and West Africa

Sahel programme, funded by the EU, which gives a platform to 15-35-year-olds by offering spaces of expression dedicated to them and by promoting social cohesion.

Lastly, the members of the Sahel Alliance call on the governments of the G5 Sahel to ensure the political inclusion of young people and their participation in decision-making and dialogue processes, particularly in transitional contexts, in order for them to contribute to the social and political transformation of their countries.

Thus, we recommend to:

- 1. Maintain and adapt our support for the benefit of the populations of the G5 Sahel in a context of growing instability and insecurity, so as not to jeopardise the gains that have been made in terms of development.** We reiterate the need to respect human rights, humanitarian principles and International Humanitarian Law, including by the defence and security forces. Furthermore, in Burkina Faso, Mali and Chad, we reiterate our demands for a swift return to constitutional order, the organisation of free, fair and transparent elections.
- 2. Reiterate our support for the G5 Sahel as a privileged partner for cooperation in the Sahel,** while recognising the current challenges this institution is facing.
- 3. Provide a coordinated response to the Sahelian populations, which meets the challenges of the major food crisis facing the G5 Sahel countries.**
- 4. Pursue efforts in the most fragile areas while strengthening our action in prevention zones,** in order to address the root causes of instability and limit the spread of conflicts and crises. Continue to support the implementation of the "civil surge" and focus our support on basic services, to strengthen the resilience of the populations by meeting their basic needs, and on local authorities and devolved state services to strengthen their presence and legitimacy on the ground as public service providers.
- 5. Strengthen our collective support to fragile peripheral areas located between the G5 Sahel countries and the coastal states of the Gulf of Guinea,** in a logic of prevention and according to modalities to be defined with our partners, inspired by the integrated territorial approach.
- 6. Intensify our support for greater socio-economic inclusion and increased participation of women and young people in political life.** Allocate more resources to education, vocational training, employment and social protection for women and young people and adapt interventions in these sectors in crisis areas. Intensify efforts to tackle gender-based violence.
- 7. Strengthen synergies with the Great Green Wall initiative to face the environmental and climate-related challenges that make vulnerable populations in the Sahel more fragile.** In a context marked by worsening food crises, soil degradation and the weakening of agricultural value chains, the members of the Sahel Alliance encourage to strengthen the collaboration with the Great Green Wall initiative based on common objectives, alignment of sectoral priorities and mutual sharing of expertise.