

## Declaration of the Sahel Alliance - General Assembly

Nouakchott - July 10, 2023

We, the representatives of the members of the Sahel Alliance, have gathered in Nouakchott on July 10, 2023, to hold the fourth General Assembly of the Sahel Alliance. This meeting was the opportunity for us to take stock of the Alliance's achievements in 2022. We also have put forward strategic priorities, in line with the reaffirmed development priorities of our partners in the Sahel, to maintain our support for the Sahelian populations in a fragile and complex environment. We welcome the accession of the West African Development Bank (BOAD) as a full member at the end of 2022, which will put its expertise and intervention capacity in the sub-region at the service of the Alliance. We would like to extend our warmest thanks to Spain for its strong commitment as President of the General Assembly for 3 years. We congratulate and wish every success to Germany, which was appointed by consensus to succeed Spain at the end of this General Assembly.

Uniting the efforts of 27 bilateral and multilateral development partners (18 full members<sup>1</sup> and 9 observers<sup>2</sup>), the Sahel Alliance is today the main framework for enhanced coordination of development cooperation initiatives in the Sahel with a portfolio of ongoing projects worth 26.5 billion euros as of 31 December 2022. With an increase of 15% since 2021, it reflects the priority given by its members to the Sahel region.

The Sahelian context remains worrying. The increase and multiplicity of insecurity factors, political transitions taking place in some countries, the growing impact of shocks linked to climate change and the war of aggression against the Ukraine are affecting development gains. This context is contributing to the increased in forced populations displacement,<sup>3</sup> as well as to already high levels of food insecurity<sup>4</sup>. These factors have an impact on the ability to effectively support the development trajectories of Sahelian countries, although providing direct support to civilian populations, local authorities and local communities has always been sought. We, members of the Sahel Alliance, express our deep concern about the deteriorating security and humanitarian situation in some regions, and recognise the need to further strengthen and coordinate our interventions to better meet the needs of populations. We reaffirm that acts that violate International Humanitarian Law (IHL) are counterproductive to security. Confronted with terrorism and the spread of violent extremism, we stress the importance of measures to counter radicalisation. Although a short-term response is crucial, it cannot alone solve the region's structural problems but should be articulated with medium- and long-term responses as the only way to lay the foundations for a prosperous and sustainable future for the people of the region.

We recognise the primary role of good governance. In addition to a rapid return to constitutional order, this means strengthening institutions and the rule of law, including at the

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<sup>1</sup> Germany, France, the European Union, the World Bank, the African Development Bank, the UN, Italy, Spain, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Denmark, the U.K., the European Investment Bank, Norway, Sweden, Canada, the U.S., the West African Development Bank.

<sup>2</sup> Japan, Belgium, Switzerland, Finland, the International Finance Corporation, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, Ireland and the *Organisation internationale de la francophonie*

<sup>3</sup>By the end of April 2023 in the Sahel region, 1.1 million refugees and asylum seekers ([Sahel situation | Global Focus \(unhcr.org\)](#)) and more than 3 million internally displaced persons, including 2 million in Burkina Faso alone <https://data.unhcr.org/fr/situations/sahelcrisis>

<sup>4</sup>5.7 million people in food crisis (phase 3-5) between March and May 2023. Projected situation: 10.2 million. <https://www.food-security.net/datas/g5-sahel/>

local level. In that sense, the promotion and protection of human rights and civic space, social cohesion as well as the strengthening of citizen participation and the fight against disinformation, seem to be important vectors of political stability and sustainable development. In this context, we therefore call for maintained dialogue to preserve achievements and continue to seek solutions. It is also important to pursue exchanges between international partners and counterparts involved, in order to support communal structures, local initiatives, civil society organisations, the private sector and non-state stakeholders committed to helping the people of the Sahel.

We emphasise the need to better understand the multifaceted interactions linking climate change, conflict and development, and to seek coordinated means of action to promote "climate security" by financing mitigation and adaptation measures and supporting major initiatives such as the Great Green Wall and the "Desert to power" initiative of the African Development Bank (AfDB).

To increase the effectiveness of our action, we launched an independent review in June 2022 to (i) take stock on the achievements of the Sahel Alliance (ii) identify opportunities to strengthen its impact (iii) put its added value into perspective, by seeking to optimise the operation of our governance bodies. The resulting recommendations aim to prioritise the Alliance's work on themes and operational issues where the Sahel Alliance offers strong added value. To this end, we recommend strengthening the link between the strategic and operational priorities and orientations set by the General Assembly and the Operational Steering Committee, the agenda of the working groups and the needs and priorities at the national and local levels. Particular attention will be paid to strengthen our country coordination platforms, especially in their role of dialogue with Sahelian partners. These recommendations guide the orientations of this General Assembly.

To this end, we, the members of the Sahel Alliance, reaffirm our commitment and encourage all international partners to increase their financial, technical and political support, while aligning themselves with the priorities and strategies defined by the Sahel countries. Together, we can overcome today's challenges and build a better future for the people of the region.

**We, the members of the Sahel Alliance recognise:**

- 1. The importance of the G5 Sahel-Alliance Sahel strategic partnership and of aligning our interventions with Sahelian strategies and priorities*

We are convinced that regional integration and solidarity remain essential to meeting the challenges facing the region. We reiterate our full support for the G5 Sahel and welcome the conclusions of the Extraordinary Head of State Sahel Summit of February 20, 2023 as well as the inter-ministerial meeting held on July 9, 2023. We emphasise the efforts made by the Sahelian states and the current Mauritanian Presidency of the G5 Sahel, whose roadmap aims to reinvigorate the regional institution. We intend to continue strengthening our dialogue with this privileged partner for cooperation in the Sahel, as demonstrated by today's signing of a revised version of the memorandum of understanding linking our two initiatives.

We are particularly committed to supporting regional dialogue and aligning ourselves with the priorities of the G5 Sahel's new Development and Security Strategy. In this respect, we welcome the organisation, on the sidelines of this General Assembly, of an operational session

with the G5 Sahel Executive Secretariat to discuss this new strategic and programmatic framework.

Promoting an enhanced framework for dialogue at regional level and in each country will contribute to rethinking the tools for joint accountability. It will provide an opportunity to discuss mutual commitments to maximise the impact of development projects supported by Sahel Alliance members. It is only through an open, joint dialogue on public policies and priority reforms that we can effectively support the States in their development policies, in line with the spirit of the Sahel Coalition's Roadmap, approved at the Extraordinary Summit of G5 Sahel Heads of State on 20 February 2023.

We also underline the efforts undertaken by the high-level panel chaired by former President of the Republic of Niger Mahamadou Issoufou, at the request of the United Nations, the African Union (AU) Commission, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the G5 Sahel to conduct a Joint Strategic Assessment aimed at finding innovative ways to address the region's security, development and governance challenges. We remain open to any recommendations that could contribute to better coordination of the various strategies and initiatives implemented in the region.

*2. The need to respond to the priorities identified by our Sahelian partners according to a selective and transformational agenda*

In line with the new Development and Security Strategy, the priorities of the G5 Sahel Priority Investment Program and the recommendations of the independent review, we aim to increase our collective commitment and impact on three strategic priorities: (i) creating employment and revenue opportunities through education, training, skills development, and entrepreneurship (ii) resilience to shocks, in particular through support for national crisis prevention and response mechanisms, (iii) territorial development and local access to basic services, with particular attention to fragile areas. In this context, we are committed to accelerating the implementation of existing structuring programs on these priorities, scaling up successful programs and launching joint initiatives of transformational scope.

Creating opportunities for Sahelian youth through education, training and skills acquisition, placed at the top of the agenda of the previous General Assembly that brought us together in Madrid on April 4, 2022, is a priority for the region. It is at the heart of the Nouakchott Declaration on education in the Sahel countries. To date, the Sahel Alliance portfolio includes almost 2 billion euros<sup>5</sup> to this sector, but the low level of literacy in the Sahel (57% compared with 77% in sub-Saharan Africa<sup>6</sup>), the many factors of exclusion such as gender, socio-economic background and security risks call for greater mobilisation to strengthen education systems and increase human capital in the region. We are committed to accelerate the implementation of existing joint initiatives and to promote new ones in order to increase opportunities for Sahelian youth, in particular through decent job creation in rural areas.

Adaptive social protection systems are essential to support and strengthen the response, adaptation and resilience strategies of the poorest households. The Alliance Sahel *side-event "Equipping Households and Governments in Times of Crisis"* organised on the sidelines of the World Bank's Springs Meetings in April 2023, provided an opportunity to discuss how to

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<sup>5</sup>Sahel Alliance portfolio as of December 31, 2022

<sup>6</sup>UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2020

strengthen adaptive social protection systems<sup>7</sup> and the partnership between governments and development partners. We are committed to further coordinating, including around the humanitarian-development nexus, and scaling up our actions, as demonstrated by the ongoing work under the World Bank's *Sahel Adaptive Social Protection Program (SASPP)*, supported by AFD, the United Kingdom, Germany (BMZ) and Denmark and the preparation of its new phase. The Sahel Alliance will be the ideal forum for reflection on joint actions in this field, the outlines and orientations of which were sketched out at the Sahel Day on 16 June in Berlin following the *Global Forum on Adaptive Social Protection* co-organised by Germany (BMZ), the World Bank, the World Food Programme (WFP), UNICEF and the GIZ.

The chronic cycles of food insecurity in the Sahel, fuelled by climate disruption and growing insecurity in the region, call for an immediate response. In 2022, the "Agriculture, rural development and food security" sector has remained the second-largest area of intervention for Sahel Alliance members with, as reflected in the portfolio, commitments of over 6 billion euros in particular in support of the Great Green Wall initiative. However, the latest projections from the Food Crisis Prevention Network alert to the urgent need for a paradigm shift to tackle the root causes of food and nutrition crises by strengthening the resilience of agricultural systems. Continued reliance on emergency food aid undermines governments' ability to invest in tackling the structural causes of hunger and malnutrition. A coordinated response is needed, alongside greater political commitment, to find more sustainable ways of dealing with recurrent crises and the growing need for food aid in the region. This implies a reorientation towards medium- and long-term structural investments focused on building resilience through systemic and territorial approaches to food issues. To this end, we commit to strengthen our joint action by seeking solutions to reverse the trends of food insecurity in the region through the strengthening of sustainable agricultural production systems and better coordination with humanitarian actions. A greater use of the climate finance tools will be sought.

Under-investment in peripheral and fragile areas may have contributed to a feeling of exclusion of populations. With this observation, we believe that the territory should be one of the cornerstones of our interventions to strengthen inclusive access to infrastructures and basic services and support decentralisation and thus restore the social contract between the State and the population. The Integrated Territorial Approach (ATI) lays at the heart of field coordination mechanisms involving all stakeholders. In Mauritania's Hodh El Chargui region, Sahel Alliance members are implementing jointly with local and national authorities the commitments made at the Néma round table held in November 2021. In Burkina Faso, the ATI is being refocused on secondary towns to meet the challenges posed by the influx of internally displaced persons (IDPs). In Niger, in the Tillabéri priority zone, members and authorities decided to focus ATI implementation on the Ayorou District, which is particularly exposed to humanitarian and security risks. We also reaffirm our commitment to implementing the Integrated Territorial Approach in the priority areas identified with the Sahel countries. More than ever, the Sahel Alliance must be a forum for sharing and seeking solutions, and for adapting operating methods in fragile areas<sup>8</sup>.

Finally, in addition to the above-mentioned priorities, we are committed to pursuing our cross-functional efforts in favour of women and girls. We call for gender equality to be taken into account transversally in our activities, with a view to empowering women in the political, social

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<sup>7</sup>Sahel Alliance members are already supporting Sahelian governments with 1.4 billion euros<sup>7</sup> to implement social protection systems and social safety nets (Sahel Alliance portfolio as of December 31, 2022)

<sup>8</sup>Regular meetings of our field coordination platforms, in particular in Mali and Burkina Faso during the crisis phases, helped to assess their impact and find solutions. In particular, Spain has organised several workshops in Bamako on the difficulties of projects' implementation in a context of insecurity.

and economic spheres, in line with the United Nations' Women, Peace and Security Agenda. We are committed to implementing the recommendations prepared by the Sahel Alliance Gender group in conclusion to the panel organised during the CPO in December 2022 with the G5 Women's Platform.

*3. The importance of addressing the root causes of fragility to limit the spread of Sahelian crises to coastal countries*

We reiterate our concern at the spread of the Sahelian crises to the coastal states of West Africa, as shown by the recent attacks in northern Benin and Togo. At the 3<sup>rd</sup> General Assembly of the Sahel Alliance in Madrid on April 4, 2022, we called for increased attention to prevention zones and pledged to step up our efforts to ensure that Sahelian populations living in fragile peripheral areas have access to essential services and economic and employment opportunities. Since then, a number of initiatives have been undertaken by the members of the Sahel Alliance, particularly in the cross-border regions between Burkina Faso, Mali, Côte d'Ivoire, Togo, Benin and Ghana.

The spread of violent extremism in coastal countries raises questions about prevention development strategies. Greater collective commitment is needed in these areas to implement multi-sectoral, tailored and conflict-sensitive interventions. Together with Sahelian and coastal countries, we call for the identification of the cross-border affected areas and to promote the ATI and the use of faster and more flexible financing mechanisms in these zones.<sup>9</sup> Particular attention will be paid to the preservation of trade and economic development corridors such as Abidjan-Ouagadougou or Cotonou-Niamey.

**We therefore recommend the following:**

- 1. Support regional integration and solidarity to meet the challenges facing the region.** In this respect, we reiterate our full support for the G5 Sahel, and commit to align ourselves with the priorities set out in the new G5 Sahel Development and its Priority Investment Programme.
- 2. Strengthen and further coordinate our support to meet the urgent needs of Sahelian populations based on clearly defined shared commitments.** In particular, we call for, in a spirit of transparency and mutual accountability, the consolidation of dialogue on development public policies and priority reforms with Sahelian states. To this end, we announce a joint overhaul of an accountability framework between the members of the Sahel Alliance and the Sahel countries.
- 3. Increase our collective commitment and impact on three strategic priorities (i) creating employment and revenue opportunities through education, training, skills development, and entrepreneurship, (ii) resilience to shocks, in particular linked to the effects of climate change (iii) territorial development and access to basic services.** Within this framework, we are committed to accelerating the implementation of existing structuring programs, scaling up successful programs and launching transformational joint initiatives. In particular, we will be seeking to increase

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<sup>9</sup> Such as the G5 Sahel Facility or the Transition Support Facility (FAT) of the AfDB.

the effectiveness of our interventions and improve the coherence between humanitarian, security and development actions to achieve greater impact.

4. **Strengthen the effectiveness and the impact of the Sahel Alliance as a platform for coordination and dialogue by implementing the recommendations of the independent review of the Sahel Alliance.** To this end, we are mandating the Sahel Alliance's Operational Steering Committee to develop an annual work plan to implement the orientations of this General Assembly.
5. **Pursue our efforts to ensure that populations living in fragile peripheral areas particularly exposed to the spread of violent extremism, have access to essential services and economic and decent employment opportunities.** The promotion of an Integrated Territorial Approach will be a priority in this respect.