

Anna-Joy Rickard, TBI – Sahel Alliance General Assembly, 10th July 2023
Speech as given

Ministers, Your Excellencies, Madames et Monsieurs

I remember sitting here in Nouakchott at the Sahel Alliance General Assembly at the end of February 2020. There was a sandstorm that meant that various attendees were left on the runway in their departure countries – including some of the German delegation and Mr Blair whose plane couldn't leave Dakar.

One week later it wasn't the weather but the pandemic that was causing havoc. And when covid hit Europe, in my opinion, it was the making of the Sahel Alliance. People more than ever needed connection points and the Sahel Alliance proved itself a worthy and crucial one.

Across the world fragmented donors mean at best fragmented impact and at worst duplication, confusion and taking the time and focus of partner governments away from their citizens and their priorities. At its heart this is what the Sahel Alliance aims to prevent – it is a commitment from the international community that says 'We stand with the Sahel', and - though it might take time and effort – 'we stand together with the Sahel not in silos'.

A lot has happened in the region since that meeting in February 2020, and our thoughts are with those who have lost their lives, those who have lost family members, and those who have lost land, livelihoods, and stability.

It has always been the strength, resilience, and power of the Sahelian communities - and especially of young people - that make me confident of a hopeful future for Sahelian countries, and convinced that the world must not turn its back – but instead firmly support this region to carve out their future.

In this vein, I briefly draw attention to a number of themes coming out of the Decentralisation and Basic Services working group that the Tony Blair Institute co-chairs with Germany.

Firstly the importance of the humanitarian - development - security nexus. This is a well understood concept, but needs to move from theoretical to implementation. Actors must talk to each other, in dialogue with communities, to find pragmatic and innovative solutions to everyday challenges faced by the populations.

Secondly, it is time to step up the Approche Territoriale Integree as a wider approach rather than a limited experiment - putting local authorities and local

plans right at the centre of it, as well as reinforcing female leadership. Where needed, this means also supporting local authorities to develop further their own plans so that donors can align with them - responding more appropriately to the priorities of local communities.

Thirdly, secondary cities are the fastest-growing urban areas, despite being under-researched and overlooked by governments. As we all know, terrorist attacks usually occur in villages, causing villagers to migrate to secondary cities - their nearest towns. As a result, secondary cities often host significant numbers of displaced people without the necessary resources or support. We must give them the attention and support they deserve.

We thank Spain for its Presidency and we welcome the priorities set out by Germany for this next year. We urge all members to step boldly into this phase. We encourage members to use the Sahel Alliance as a vehicle and mechanism for joint initiatives and for joint innovation, and most importantly we encourage it to remain centred around Sahelian solutions to Sahelian challenges and opportunities.

Merci beaucoup, Shukran.