

Press release  
*For immediate release*

## **UN WARNS SAHEL CRISIS IS REACHING UNPRECEDENTED LEVELS**

Geneva, 8 May – Top UN officials today warned that insecurity and armed attacks in the Sahel have reached unprecedented levels. They called for increased humanitarian aid to millions of people affected by the spread of violence.

Briefing UN Member States in Geneva, the Resident and Humanitarian Coordinators for Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger warned that humanitarian needs had surpassed the available resources, as violence persists and risks spilling over into coastal West African countries.

The number of security incidents in Burkina Faso, Mali and western Niger has sharply increased in recent months. Over 150 violent incidents were recorded in April alone, claiming more than 300 lives. The crisis is affecting extremely vulnerable families. Needs in the Sahel are chronically high, and communities are still struggling to recover from the impact of severe drought that hit the region last year.

“Many of those affected by the violence now were already facing dire hardship. For them it’s double devastation,” noted Mbaranga Gasarabwe, Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary General and UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator in Mali. “The violence is compounding high levels of food insecurity and malnutrition and threatening civilians’ lives and livelihoods. It is also heightening protection needs, and jeopardizing social cohesion.”

In just one year, internal displacement has increased five-fold, uprooting more than 330,000 people, in addition to 100,000 refugees. The violence has severely affected education and health services. Across the region, more than 1,800 schools have closed - some for over three years in a row – and over 80 health centres are shut or partially operational.

“We cannot stress enough the urgency of the situation. The future of a whole generation is at stake,” said Metsi Makhetha, the UN Resident Coordinator for Burkina Faso. “The UN, partner humanitarian organizations and Governments have stepped up operations. But we must do more.”

In 2019, 5.1 million people in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger’s western Tahoua and Tillabéri regions need humanitarian assistance. Aid organizations have appealed for US\$600 million to assist 3.7 million hardest-hit people. Four months into 2019 however, the average funding stands at only 19 per cent.

“We must act now and fast. And we must also act for the long-term,” stressed Fatou Bintou Djibo, UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator in Niger. “Sustained relief efforts, economic and social development are key. In the Sahel, violence is also rooted in a sentiment of marginalisation and disenfranchisement.”

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