



Security Council

Distr.: General
10 May 2021

Original: English

Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel

Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution [2391 \(2017\)](#), in which the Council requested the Secretary-General, in close coordination with the members of the Group of Five for the Sahel (G5 Sahel) – Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and the Niger – and the African Union, to report on the activities of the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel and the support provided by the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) in this regard. The Council adopted resolution [2531 \(2020\)](#), renewing the mandate of MINUSMA and recommending enhanced support to the Joint Force.

2. The report provides an update on progress made in the operationalization of the Joint Force since the report of 2 November 2020 ([S/2020/1074](#)), including international support for the Joint Force and implementation of the technical agreement signed between the United Nations, the European Union and G5 Sahel States in February 2018. The report also highlights the challenges encountered by the Joint Force and the implementation by the G5 Sahel States of a human rights and international humanitarian law compliance framework. Finally, as requested by the Security Council in its resolution [2531 \(2020\)](#), the report includes an assessment of the implementation of paragraph 13 of resolution [2391 \(2017\)](#), including with regard to the human rights due diligence policy and the prospects of the G5 Sahel executive secretariat and the Joint Force improving their autonomy and setting up their own procurement system.

3. The reporting period was marked by a deterioration of the security situation in the Sahel, with continued complex terrorist attacks on positions of national and regional defence and security forces, especially in the Liptako-Gourma region, where the borders of Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger converge. The tri-border area remains the main hotspot, despite the pressure of counter-terrorism operations and infighting between the two main terrorist armed groups, Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin, affiliated with Al Qaida, and Islamic State in the Greater Sahara. An uptick in attacks against civilians has been registered, including against local authorities and religious figures. The western regions of the Niger have seen a growing death toll among civilians in 2021. At least 300 people have been killed in three major attacks in 2021, including the most recent attack on 21 March in the Tillia area, in which at least 137 people were killed. The frequency of the use of improvised



explosive devices against civilians and defence and security forces increased in December 2020 and January 2021, in particular in central Mali and the south-west region of Tillabéri in the Niger. Meanwhile, the number of financial extortions of the populations has continued to rise, notably in Mali and the Niger. While enhanced regional military action is aimed at reversing the balance of power in the Liptako-Gourma region, the threat of further destabilization and concern over the spread of the security threat to the south and the West African coast are real.

4. Intercommunal conflicts continued to add to the complexity of the security environment in which the Joint Force operates. Often instrumentalized by local armed groups and terrorist organizations, local conflict dynamics are exacerbated by an acceleration of resource pressures driven by climate change and demographic pressures, unmitigated by economic development or adaptation. The compounded crises are devastating the region, putting millions at risk. The latest available data indicate that, in 2021, 6.8 million people were food-insecure in G5 Sahel countries. The threat of famine is now looming in Burkina Faso. Also, since 2018, in the Liptako-Gourma region, the number of internally displaced people has risen twentyfold. In G5 Sahel States, close to 2.2 million people were internally displaced and more than 880,000 people were refugees. Large-scale displacement continued to have an impact on State service provision and the availability of natural resources, further exacerbating tension and social conflicts.

II. Operationalization of the Joint Force

5. In Sector West between Mali and Mauritania, the Joint Force reported the continued presence of armed terrorist groups around the Ouagadou forest. It also reported sporadic clashes between Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin and Islamic State in the Greater Sahara. In addition, in that area, deadly clashes between traditional hunters and terrorist armed groups were reported.

6. The Joint Force reported activity by armed groups in the southern part of Sector East located between the Niger and Chad. In the northern part of Sector East, the situation has reportedly been calmer than in other areas of operation of the Force. While the two Force battalions in Madama (Niger) and Wour (Chad) have encountered particular challenges linked to the activities of traffickers and elements of Libya-based armed groups, their patrols have disrupted the flow of illegal trafficking, including by considerably hampering the mobility of traffickers and other armed bandits. In Sector Centre between Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger, the Joint Force reported a certain respite as a result of coordinated actions by the forces on the ground, namely the Joint Force, national forces and Operation Barkhane, joined by Task Force Takuba. The Joint Force reported a disruption in the logistical chains of armed groups, in addition to attrition in their ranks. However, Sector Centre remains the epicentre of the activities of armed terrorist groups in the areas of Joint Force operations. The presence of terrorist armed groups is rapidly evolving in an area of action of several thousand square kilometres. It has become the theatre of recurrent clashes between Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin and Islamic State in the Greater Sahara. The Islamic State in the greater Sahara, although weakening and no longer in a position to attack military camps as in 2019, has not disappeared. Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin continues to gain momentum by expanding its regional influence and consolidating its organization. Currently, the group is destabilizing the centre and the northern peripheries of Mali, as well as the northern borders of Burkina Faso, and presents the highest threat.

A. Military component

7. During the previous and current reporting periods, two major operations were conducted in Sector Centre, in coordination with Operation Barkhane, aimed at improving the security situation. Operation Sama 2, which started on 1 August 2020 with the aim of consolidating control of the zone secured during Operation Sama 1, ended on 31 January 2021. It was also aimed at building trust between the Joint Force and civilian populations, facilitating the gradual return of national armed forces and local authorities and enabling civil-military projects. However, few State representatives have returned to the area. The offensive phase of Operation Sama 2 started in the first week of November 2020 and continued until the beginning of January 2021, strengthened by the deployment of the eighth Chadian battalion in early March 2021.

8. During Operation Sama 2, Boulikessi (Mali) came under attack on several occasions and a major attack took place on 24 January 2021, demonstrating that the terrorist armed groups, although often disorganized, weakened and losing ground, remain determined to pursue their fight. During the military campaign, the Joint Force reported a strong dynamic of power struggles among terrorist armed groups over influence and territorial control and noted that this dynamic was likely to continue. In March 2021, the Force launched Operation Sama 3, aimed at strengthening and consolidating the outcome of Operation Sama 1 and Operation Sama 2.

9. Despite the challenging security situation, the Joint Force command has assessed that Operation Sama 1 and Operation Sama 2 have had a notably positive impact. The operations have helped to keep up the pressure on armed and terrorist groups and to reinforce trust between the Force and civilian populations. The Joint Force also reports increased collaboration between its units and the population.

10. The eighth Chadian battalion of the Joint Force, comprising 1,200 elements, deployed in the tri-border area at the beginning of March 2021. The battalion took up residence in Téra, 160 km north-west of Niamey, near the border with Burkina Faso. Téra is also where the future Joint Force logistics base will be located for its operations in the Liptako-Gourma region. This brings the total number of Joint Force troops to 5,534 soldiers, 305 of whom are securing the four multinational command posts. However, the impact of the evolving situation in Chad on the country's engagement in the Sahel is to be closely monitored.

11. During the reporting period, the Joint Force and partners, such as Operation Barkhane, the Malian Defence and Security Forces and MINUSMA, continued their coordination through joint meetings and bilateral exchanges. Operational coordination meetings have also continued on a monthly basis to share assessments between all partner forces.

B. Police component

12. There was slow progress in the operationalization of the police component, especially with regard to the Special Investigation Units. As far as the provost units are concerned, 13 gendarmes per unit have been deployed within their respective battalions, in addition to 11 gendarmes in the second Chadian battalion, and are operational for the most part. For the latter battalion, specific equipment is on its way and is in the process of being put in place. During the reporting period, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) participated in the predeployment training of three incoming provost units, from 25 to 29 January 2021 for those units destined for the two Malian battalions in Goma Coura, Mali;

from 8 to 12 March for those destined for Boulikessi; and from 29 March to 2 April 2021 for those destined for the Chadian battalion in Wour.

13. During the reporting period, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and OHCHR continued to assist the Joint Force with strengthening its police component through the development of a specialized training programme. Initiated in July 2020, the Joint Force, UNODC, OHCHR, the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL)/the African Police Cooperation Organization (AFRIPOL), the European Union and MINUSMA jointly developed a specialized training programme for the police component, which was validated during a workshop held in Niamey from 16 to 19 November 2020, followed by the delivery of the first pilot training programme in Nouakchott from 22 to 26 March 2021.

C. G5 Sahel executive secretariat

14. In order to strengthen the coordination of G5 Sahel activities, each G5 Sahel member State established a national coordination committee made up of experts from the governance, development and security sectors. The national coordination committees operate under the authority of the G5 Sahel executive secretariat with the main mission of coordinating and monitoring the implementation of the framework of cooperation between the G5 Sahel member States.

15. UNODC continued to assist the G5 Sahel executive secretariat in its effort to mainstream gender in the security sector. From 16 to 19 March 2021, a workshop co-organized by UNODC and OHCHR was held in Nouakchott for heads and senior officials of security forces from G5 Sahel countries on gender diversity as a driver of change, in accordance with the G5 Sahel plan of action to increase the number of women in uniform in the defence and security sectors of the region. OHCHR and UNODC continue to advocate for the increased nomination of women in senior military and police ranks, noting their importance in enabling armed forces to effectively fulfil their mandates, through inter alia, bringing additional perspectives in operation planning and key decision-making, especially with respect to decisions affecting civilians, particularly women and girls, as well as greater levels of community access, thus enhancing the protection of civilians. During the reporting period, the executive secretariat continued to pursue its efforts to develop a regional strategy for the protection of civilians in G5 Sahel countries with the support of OHCHR, including by organizing with the Joint Force a dedicated workshop in Mali from 23 to 26 November 2020 to inform the future regional strategy for the protection of civilians and to engage with a wide range of stakeholders, including national human rights institutions, local and traditional authorities and civil society.

D. Issues and challenges

16. The Joint Force continued to face major challenges to its operational and logistical capacities with regard to providing troop supplies, an issue which was worsened by a lack of suitable means of transport. More generally, equipment shortfalls remained a daily concern that constrained the efficiency and operations of troops deployed in garrisons, as well as affecting morale. For instance, while the arrival of the Chadian battalion of 1,200 troops was an extremely positive sign, the Chadian soldiers and their equipment had to travel more than 2,000 km, from N'guigmi to Niamey, during which they experienced logistical difficulties, in particular related to the supply of fuel and the breakdown of certain military equipment. Likewise, medical and casualty evacuation capacities continued to be a challenge in all sectors.

17. The Joint Force does not possess air capacity, although such capacity remains critical to the effective execution of anti-terrorist efforts. Furthermore, the Force would benefit from a comprehensive intelligence system. In this regard, the acquisition of sensors and surveillance equipment, such as short-range ground radars or drones, is envisaged under European Union funding. In order for the Joint Force to meet its objectives, effective coordination with the various forces on the ground is crucial, in addition to strengthening local dialogue and intelligence-sharing. Contingents from different operations must strengthen their intelligence cooperation in order to reach a common understanding of the situation, especially when they are co-located, as in Gao, Mali.

III. Implementation of the human rights and international humanitarian law compliance framework of the Joint Force and the human rights due diligence policy

18. MINUSMA and OHCHR continued to monitor the human rights situation in relation to operations conducted by the Joint Force. During the reporting period, several security-related incidents amounting to serious human rights violations were documented in Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali and the Niger. The direct responsibility of the Force was established in a number of incidents.

19. During the month of February 2021, the Chadian battalion of the Joint Force based in Wour arrested 36 individuals, including 27 suspected minors, during routine patrols. On 13 February, the general staff of the Chadian armed forces handed over the minors to the Ministry for Women and Childhood Protection. OHCHR in Chad is following up closely on the case.

20. On 4 March, OHCHR monitored the trials in Néma, Mauritania, of two former Joint Force soldiers, who were charged with murder and rape, respectively. The alleged perpetrator of murder was found guilty under article 271 of the Mauritanian Criminal Code and was sentenced to death under article 280 of the Criminal Code. The sentence was commuted to life imprisonment because Mauritania has had a moratorium on the use of the death penalty in place since 1987. Regarding the rape case, the alleged perpetrator was found guilty under article 309 of the Mauritanian Criminal Code and was sentenced to four years' imprisonment.

21. On 28 March 2021, several allegations of sexual violence (including three cases of rape, one of a minor girl) that occurred between 15 and 27 March, allegedly involving soldiers of the eighth Chadian battalion of the Joint Force in Téra, the Niger, were brought to the attention of OHCHR and the Force. The Force immediately implemented a number of measures, in accordance with procedures for the conduct of internal investigations, as part of the compliance framework. The measures included, notably, the establishment of an internal commission of inquiry on 30 March and the deployment of a delegation on 31 March, led by the Commander of Sector Centre, to give instructions to the troops in Téra and to meet with departmental authorities and community leaders in an effort to reassure the local population. The Human Rights Commission of the Niger also launched an investigation and issued a communiqué on 2 April confirming, inter alia, the three rapes. On 3 April, the Force issued a communiqué confirming the reports of sexual violence and announcing a series of measures, including the opening of an investigation into the involvement of Force members and the ensuing disciplinary and legal action against them, as appropriate, to address the reports. On the same day, a similar statement was issued by the authorities of Chad. As part of its ongoing support for the Force's implementation of its compliance framework, OHCHR continues to support the Force

with ongoing monitoring; implementing preventive and remedial measures; and providing other technical assistance to the Force, as needed.

22. With OHCHR support, the Joint Force continued to register progress in the operationalization of its human rights and international humanitarian law compliance framework, including by developing several internal mechanisms that help to enhance its ability to comply with international law in the conduct of its operations. The mechanisms include, in particular, the Casualty and Incident Tracking and Analysis Cell, officially launched in Bamako on 27 January 2021; the practice of sending radio messages before operations to all intervention units on their obligations under international humanitarian and human rights law; and monitoring of the capture, retention and transfer of detainees.

23. During the reporting period, MINUSMA conducted 28 human rights due diligence policy risk assessments on requests for United Nations operational support for the Joint Force, which resulted in a recommendation to provide support. As part of the risk assessments, a number of mitigation measures were identified, including with regard to the implementation of the Force's compliance framework, with a view to reducing the identified risks and communicating them to the Force to ensure full compliance with the principles of the human rights due diligence policy. The measures included (a) the effective implementation of the standard operating procedures for internal inquiries, which were launched in respect of the series of human rights violations communicated to the Force (including those in public reports); (b) the finalization of key framework documents, notably on the use of brigades during joint operations; (c) the sharing of lists of members of battalions operating under the Force command for screening purposes; and (d) the sharing of information on incidents that had an impact on civilians during operations. The nomination of a focal point by the Force and the systematic submission of the required questionnaire prior to requests for support made it possible to accelerate the processing of requests.

24. The ongoing challenge presented by the dual command lines of battalions seconded to the Joint Force persists. Difficulties in distinguishing between operations conducted in a national capacity and those conducted under the command of the Force continue to have negative consequences in determining responsibility for incidents involving civilians and other cases of serious human rights violations, especially in cross-border operations. The establishment of a "deconfliction" mechanism involving the MINUSMA Human Rights and Protection Division, the OHCHR compliance framework project team, the Joint Force and the commands of the five countries has been identified as a solution that would allow for information exchange and more readability. Although most contingents hold sensitization sessions prior to the deployment of their forces, it was also considered essential to increase tailored training to build capacity and awareness with regard to international humanitarian and human rights law before and during the conduct of joint operations, in particular through the training of trainers.

IV. International support for the Joint Force

A. Support from the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali

25. MINUSMA continued to provide logistical support to the seven battalions operating under the command of the Joint Force within the framework of its mandate. Two requests related to petrol, oil and lubricants and casualty evacuation were received between 8 November 2020 and 30 March 2021 and were followed by the

required human rights due diligence policy assessments. In terms of average response time, MINUSMA was able to adhere to the 14 days prescribed in the technical agreement between the G5 Sahel, the United Nations and the European Commission, except in relation to petrol, which required a longer purchasing time because it is included only in very small quantities in the standard fuel contract held by MINUSMA, and the amount purchased was insufficient to satisfy the demands of the Force. All requests from the Force have been honoured to date.

Update on requests for life support consumables received by contingents

26. On 10 October 2020, MINUSMA received the Joint Force's quarterly support plan for the period from October to December 2020, which included 0.6 million litres of fuel and lubricants, amounting to \$0.7 million; this represents a collection and consumption rate of 100 per cent of the quarterly support plan. The Mission responded positively to the plan and to specific requests, which are subject to human rights risk assessment and due diligence.

27. On 6 January 2021, the Joint Force submitted its quarterly support plan for the period from January to March 2021. The quantities and pick-up locations for the items contained in the plan are summarized in the table below.

Pick-up locations and items requested in the quarterly support plan (January-March)

<i>Location</i>	<i>Combat ration packs (packs)</i>	<i>Fuel (l)</i>	<i>Water (l)</i>	<i>Oil 50 (l)</i>	<i>Grease (kg)</i>	<i>Coolant (l)</i>
Bamako	–	474 300	–	7 000	720	720
Gao	–	60 000	–	1 000	120	120
Sévaré	–	80 000	–	1 000	120	120
Total	–	614 300	–	9 000	960	960

Update on the process of identification of contractors to procure and deliver life support consumables to contingents operating outside Mali

28. Under resolution [2531 \(2020\)](#), the Mission's mandate to provide support to the Joint Force was enhanced and the Mission was allowed to contract private companies for the delivery of life support consumables to contingents operating outside of Mali within the framework of Force operations. During the reporting period, MINUSMA held a series of consultations with the Force and the G5 Sahel executive secretariat. The consultations provided the strategic direction that guided experts from both MINUSMA and the Force to gather and organize key information for the preparation of statements of requirements specifying the details of the services required from prospective contractors. Contractors should be capable of delivering life support consumables closer to the area of operations of the Force's contingents while managing associated security risks.

29. There was significant outreach to facilitate wide dissemination of the call for expressions of interest in providing the required services, including through G5 Sahel countries. The procurement process for life support consumables is currently ongoing. It is expected that contracts will be awarded by June 2021 and that services would begin thereafter, estimated to be one to three months. Meanwhile, MINUSMA continued to support the Joint Force on the basis of the current support model until new arrangements are in place.

Update on engineering and casualty and medical evacuation

30. Neither engineering support nor casualty evacuation and transport took place during the period under review, although the capacity was made available in accordance with the Joint Force planned operations.

Update on resource mobilization efforts

31. The European Union earmarked a total of 10 million euros for MINUSMA support for the Joint Force. On 29 December 2020, the European Union disbursed the second tranche of 5 million euros (\$6.1 million). MINUSMA has therefore received the total amount of 10 million euros (equivalent to \$12.3 million).

32. The European Union pledged an additional 7 million euros (\$8.5 million) to cover expanded support for the Joint Force until February 2022. Given that the contract period will run for a year at the time of signature, and in the absence of any indication of financial support beyond February 2022, it will be important to ensure that the funding is aligned with the contract period.

33. The Mission's operational and logistical support for the Joint Force has so far relied on European Union funds. While European Union support in this regard is to be commended, the reliance on voluntary financial contributions continues to raise issue with respect to the predictability and therefore sustainability of resourcing.

B. Multilateral support

34. On 15 and 16 February, the seventh Summit of Heads of State of the Group of Five for the Sahel was held in N'Djamena. The Summit, which for the first time saw the participation of other West African leaders, such as the President of Ghana, Nana Akuffo-Addo, and the President of Senegal, Macky Sall, welcomed the efforts of regional defence and security forces. Praising the contribution of Operation Barkhane, the Summit called for increased collaboration between the G5 Sahel Joint Force and the Multinational Joint Task Force of the Lake Chad Basin Commission. It also called for a Chapter VII mandate for the Joint Force of the G5 Sahel and for the creation of a dedicated United Nations office to support the Joint Force. The Summit also welcomed the contribution from Senegal of 1 billion CFA francs (\$1.8 million) towards the operationalization of the Joint Force. On 16 February, on the margins of the Summit, the members of the Coalition for the Sahel appointed Djimet Adoum of Chad as the High Representative of the Coalition.

35. On 2 March, the Coalition for the Sahel held a meeting to review the communiqué adopted at the N'Djamena Summit and to discuss the way forward, including with regard to the fight against terrorism, the strengthening of the capacity of the national armed forces and the Joint Force, the deployment of State services and basic social services, and development actions. On 10 March, the Coalition held a ministerial meeting to assess the situation in the Sahel. This was followed by a second ministerial meeting of foreign ministers, on 19 March 2021, during which the Coalition adopted a road map setting clear milestones for the common objectives of Coalition members in the Sahel, including the operationalization of the "civil and political surge" called for at the N'Djamena Summit. Members of the Coalition unanimously hailed the road map as an opportunity to define the "civil and political surge" in practice.

36. On 2 April, the Minister of the Armed Forces of France and her Estonian and Czech counterparts confirmed the full operational capacity of Task Force Takuba during a joint visit to Mali. Launched on 27 March 2020 at the initiative of France, Task Force Takuba is part of Operation Barkhane and was deployed in its most recent

major operations, namely Operation Bourrasque and Operation Eclipse. It is made up of some special forces from European Member States that train, advise and accompany Malian units in combat in the Liptako-Gourma region. In Gao and Ménaka (Mali), Estonian, Czech and Swedish forces were engaged in daily operations in support of Malian units. Italy began its deployment, and other countries plan to join Task Force Takuba in the coming months.

C. Regional and subregional initiatives

37. Since the decision by the Assembly of the African Union, during its thirty-third session in February 2020, in consultation with the ministries of defence of the G5 Sahel countries and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), to develop a framework for the deployment of an African Union force composed of 3,000 troops to reinforce the G5 Sahel Joint Force, efforts have continued towards finalizing of the concept of operations and troop deployments. The African Union Commission is conducting consultations with ECOWAS and the countries of the region. In the meantime, ECOWAS has continued to hold discussions on the adoption of national strategies to combat violent extremism.

38. On 8 and 9 February, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for West Africa and the Sahel, Mohamed Ibn Chambas, chaired a meeting of the steering committee of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel in a context characterized by the ongoing coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, as well as security challenges that have caused delays in programme delivery, while implementing partners have had to reduce their footprints on the ground. The meeting provided an opportunity to take stock and highlight progress across various pillars of work, and reflect on ways and means to improve results on the ground. United Nations entities will continue to engage regional entities, such as the G5 Sahel, the Lake Chad Basin Commission, the Liptako-Gourma Authority and others, to align the strategy with their priorities and plans. Those various elements are reflected in the road map for the implementation of the strategy for 2021 and 2022.

V. Assessment of the model for the provision of support by the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali to the Joint Force

39. In its resolution [2531 \(2020\)](#), the Security Council requested the Secretary-General to include in his April 2021 report on the G5 Sahel an assessment of the implementation of paragraph 13 of resolution [2391 \(2017\)](#), including with regard to the human rights due diligence policy and the prospects of the executive secretariat and the Joint Force improving their autonomy and setting up their own procurement system. This assessment was conducted by the Secretariat in consultation with relevant stakeholders and its main findings are summarized below.

A. Support provided by the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali to the Joint Force and implementation of the tripartite mechanism

40. While MINUSMA support is additional to bilateral support and G5 Sahel Member States' direct contributions to battalions, it has contributed to the success of Joint Force operations. The Joint Force and partners qualified logistical and operational support by MINUSMA as essential. In particular, the provision of life

support consumables was deemed to be a critical contributing factor in increasing and sustaining the Force's activities. The Force and partners also highlighted their appreciation for the Mission's medical evacuations of Force soldiers within Mali. The Force urged MINUSMA and other partners to continue the current coordination and pooling of logistical, operational, technical and financial capacities.

41. Nevertheless, several challenges have hampered the provision of logistical and operational support by MINUSMA. MINUSMA and partners have indicated that, in some instances, the Joint Force seems to lack the capacity to collect the delivered life support consumables from the designated collection points within Mali. In other instances, in Chad and Mauritania, MINUSMA received reports of life support consumables being delivered and collected but not reaching the battalions, which indicates the Force's lack of capacity to travel long distances to deliver supplies. While it has proved difficult under the support model to ensure that support reaches battalions, the enhanced support model could overcome this, as commercial contractors will be responsible for directly delivering supplies to the battalions on the basis of locations agreed and identified by the Force. This approach would help the Commander of the Force to ensure that all battalions under his command receive the support needed to conduct their operations. For example, the Force has contracted a company in Mali that collects petroleum products from Bamako and dispatches them to selected locations.

42. The technical agreement signed by the United Nations, the European Commission and the G5 Sahel on 23 February 2018 and amended on 25 February 2020 requires the Joint Force to submit quarterly support requests for life support consumables to be procured by MINUSMA, providing detailed projections of the required quantities for a period of three months. Frequent delays in receiving this information have rendered the provision of life support consumables by MINUSMA challenging at times. It is important for the Force to take the necessary steps to improve its internal planning processes. This issue is all the more important given that the larger-scale support to be delivered by a commercial contractor under the enhanced support model requires even more rigorous planning.

43. While resolution [2531 \(2020\)](#) extends the provision of life support consumables to contingents operating outside Mali, the Joint Force has expressed the need to further extend operational support to include engineering support and casualty and medical evacuations to the remaining four countries, especially considering the high number of attacks in the tri-border area between Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger. The Force has taken the view that this geographical extension of the Mission's essential support can be achieved only through the establishment of a dedicated, separate United Nations support office providing full logistical and operational support, including transport, as well as tactical and strategic support to the Joint Force.

B. Implementation of the human rights due diligence policy

44. The human rights due diligence policy was acknowledged as an important lever for achieving progress in the implementation, by recipients of United Nations support, of their obligations under international human rights and humanitarian law. The policy has also been important in placing human rights and the protection of civilians at the centre of support for the Joint Force, with OHCHR staff in all five countries tailoring the implementation of the policy to the specificities of the Force and the high-risk environment in which it operates.

45. Nevertheless, many challenges remain. Overall, MINUSMA and partners also highlighted that G5 Sahel member States must, when conducting Joint Force

operations, continue to uphold their obligations under international humanitarian, human rights and refugee law by employing a more efficient mechanism to ensure greater transparency, discipline and accountability in response to grave human rights violations. MINUSMA and partners noted the lack of information from the Force on the conduct of operations, including their possible impact on civilians, as well as information on the pending investigation of or appropriate follow-up on human rights violations allegedly committed by elements of the Force. G5 Sahel diplomatic and Joint Force interlocutors noted that operational constraints mainly linked to limitations in the application of the human rights due diligence policy in counter-terrorism operations should be taken into account. Most interlocutors highlight that the policy, which involved capacity-building of the forces under the Joint Force command, should be considered a long-term endeavour.

46. The interlocutors made a number of recommendations going forward, including with regard to the harmonization of rotation plans among Joint Force contingents. In addition, to further strengthen the capacity of the Force, the troop- and police-contributing countries should continue to prepare their contingents at the national level, including by conducting adequate predeployment training and screening. In that regard, the compliance framework project stands ready to engage with the national authorities of the G5 Sahel countries and to provide support in the alignment of their selection and screening methods, including through sharing proven regional and global best practices and standards.

47. Further progress in the implementation by MINUSMA of the human rights due diligence policy would require stronger coordination among partners, alongside continued efforts to strengthen the capacity of the United Nations to monitor and implement the policy and the compliance framework on the ground.

C. Prospects of the executive secretariat and the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel improving their autonomy and setting up their own procurement system

48. In its resolution [2531 \(2020\)](#), the Security Council stresses that operational and logistical support from MINUSMA, as per the conditions set by resolution [2391 \(2017\)](#), is a temporary measure to allow the Joint Force to enhance its ability to deliver on its mandate. In addition, the strategic concept of operations of the Force of 8 March 2017 provides that the G5 Sahel countries are responsible for supporting its forces, through their national logistics chains. This support covers administration and finance, information and communication systems, equipment, logistical support (water, fuel and ammunition), medical support, accommodation, infrastructure, screening and training. While MINUSMA and other partners have a role to play, the provision of support remains the primary responsibility of G5 Sahel countries.

49. The G5 Sahel executive secretariat is tasked with carrying out the administrative and financial command of the Joint Force, covering personnel costs, the operating budget and investments. Following the Conference of Heads of State of the G5 Sahel held on 6 February 2018, a trust fund was created. To date, the fund has received contributions from Rwanda (\$500,000), the West African Economic and Monetary Union (approximately \$867,000), the United Arab Emirates (10 million euros) and Turkey (\$5 million). A second tranche of \$500,000 was pledged by Rwanda, in addition to \$100 million pledged by Saudi Arabia and a further 20 million euros pledged by the United Arab Emirates. The executive secretariat continues to advocate for the disbursement of the remaining pledged funds and for new pledges.

50. Although placed under the functional authority of the executive secretariat, to which the role of authorizing officer has been delegated, the trust fund has its own

staff and a specific internal manual that defines the rules of administrative, financial and accounting management of the fund. The trust fund mechanism is managed by a support committee and a control committee. The support committee is a multilateral body that acts as an interface between the Joint Force and the executive secretariat. The control committee is in charge of validating financial procedures and its reports are submitted to the Minister of Defence of the State holding the rotating G5 Sahel presidency, who exercises authority over the budget, while the Executive Secretary exercises delegated authority over the budget.

51. G5 Sahel stakeholders and partners confirmed that the support committee has enabled the purchase of equipment for the Joint Force (84 vehicles amounting to \$11 million – 42 general-purpose trucks and 42 fuel and oil tankers) by conducting the necessary procurement, which was praised as transparent by partners of the G5 Sahel. Partners pointed to this as a positive indication that the G5 Sahel has gained autonomy in managing administrative and financial matters linked to the trust fund, including through an ability to use its own procurement system. It was highlighted that, while the G5 Sahel executive secretariat, as supported by the support committee, has the legal and technical capacity for procuring fuel, oil, combat rations and equipment for the Force, it does not yet have the necessary expertise in regard to engineering and it therefore does not currently conduct or fund projects related to premises and infrastructure.

VI. Observations

52. Since the Pau Summit in January 2020, the Joint Force has continued to steadily grow in strength. I am encouraged by the deployment of the eighth battalion of the Chadian Army at the beginning of March 2021, which is expected to consolidate the gains of the Force. While the Force is becoming increasingly operational, it still lacks the necessary financial and logistical means to become autonomous. Therefore, the sustainability of the Force will depend on predictable and adequate resources. I reiterate my call for a more comprehensive solution that ensures predictable funding of Force operations.

53. I acknowledge the importance of Operation Barkhane in contributing to the weakening of violent extremist groups and allowing the Joint Force and national armies to gain strength. In this regard, I take note of the full operational capacity of Task Force Takuba to support the Malian armed forces in combat. I also note the growing commitment of the international community and the States of the region to the fight against terrorism, demonstrated at the Summit of Heads of State of the G5 Sahel in N'Djamena. I echo the need to continue the strengthening of the Joint Force and pursue stabilization efforts in Mali while coordinating all initiatives.

54. I express my deep gratitude to my outgoing Special Representative for Mali, Mahamat Saleh Annadif, and to all MINUSMA colleagues, who have spared no effort to ensure that the Mission provides support to the Joint Force whenever it is requested. Nevertheless, the operational and logistical support provided by MINUSMA to the Force, in particular within the framework of the tripartite mechanism financed by the European Union, continues to face challenges that hamper the implementation of the Mission's mandate in this regard. These difficulties highlight the challenges of the current support model. Echoing the call of G5 Sahel States, some partners have highlighted that the scale and nature of ongoing challenges in providing logistical and operational support to the Force are unprecedented and therefore warrant a new approach, fully backed by the political and financial commitment of the Security Council and regional partners.

55. I commend the G5 Sahel member States and all partners for their tireless efforts to address the security challenges faced by the Sahel region. However, I am particularly concerned about the continued deterioration of the situation. We must enhance our partnerships and redouble our efforts in support of the people and Governments of the G5 Sahel member States. This is also critical to preventing a potential spillover of the crisis, as terrorist groups reportedly seek to expand their spheres of influence beyond the Sahel. The United Nations stands ready to further support the efforts of the G5 Sahel, including through capacity-building support in areas such as prevention of violent extremism and radicalization, border security management, cybersecurity and protection of vulnerable targets.

56. I acknowledge the renewed commitment made by the Heads of State of the G5 Sahel and their partners at their Summit in N'Djamena to the principle that compliance with human rights due diligence principles remains a prerequisite in the fight against terrorism and should be the basis for the protection of civilians. The persistence of human rights violations allegedly committed by security forces while combating terrorism is, however, of great concern. In that context, with regard to the serious allegations of sexual violence reportedly committed by members of the eighth Chadian battalion of the Force deployed in the Niger in late March, I welcome the prompt reaction of the Force and the authorities of Chad and the Niger and their commitment to investigating the allegations and prosecuting the perpetrators. These instances furthermore attest to the progress made by the Force towards the implementation of the human rights and international humanitarian law compliance framework. It is essential that the victims of these and any other human rights violations committed by security forces receive the justice they deserve.

57. I stress the need to strengthen the trust between civilians and armed forces and I welcome the efforts of MINUSMA and OHCHR to advocate the inclusion of more women in force generation. The presence of women officers enhances community engagement strategies and positively contributes to the protection of civilians which is central to achieving the mission. Therefore, coordination between civil and military justice must be strengthened in accordance with international law.

58. Overall, the humanitarian situation in the Sahel is rapidly and significantly deteriorating because of escalating conflict, rising food insecurity and the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, driving humanitarian needs to unprecedented levels. The Sahel is one of the regions of the world that is most exposed to disasters and is a hotspot of climate change. For the Sahel, climate change is not a future concern, it is a daily reality. Unpredictable weather patterns, droughts, floods and land degradation are having a severe impact on fragile rural and pastoralist livelihoods, fuelling intercommunal violence and forcing people to flee their homes.

59. Finally, I welcome the increasing commitments under the Coalition for the Sahel, which aims to enable coherent action at the regional level, encompassing all actors involved in the Sahel, whether in relation to security, political or development issues. I reiterate the importance of providing a collective and united response to the crisis in the Sahel. I note the growing recognition to shift from a security-centred approach to one that includes development in parallel to the security efforts. There is a need for all actors to scale up funding and support to address the root causes of conflict in the fields of development, service delivery and governance.