#ÁfricaEsNoticia Seminar Security in West Africa: Lessons drawn from instability in the Sahel

<u>CONCLUSIONS</u>

Las Palmas de Gran Canaria – Madrid – Accra
Thursday, 5th November 2020

Organizers: **Casa África** (Spain), **Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores, Unión Europea y Cooperación** (MAEC, Spain), **Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Centre** (KAIPTC, Ghana)

In an online meeting with the presence of experts and panelists from three venues in Madrid (Casa Árabe), Las Palmas de Gran Canaria (Casa África) and Accra (KAIPTC), the aim of this meeting was to bring together African and Spanish experts to reflect jointly on a reality of security in West Africa which, as has been shown, is beginning to constitute an element of attention and concern among all the actors present in the region: The potential expansion of the current instability of the Sahel, which mainly in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger is experiencing a very complicated moment of worsening violence, to the rest of the countries of West Africa. On this occasion, this Seminar focused on the potential extension of the conflict towards the southern coastal countries, Ghana, Benin, Togo and Ivory Coast.

The inaugural speeches of the three heads of the organising institutions have already indicated the main interest in the convening of this event (**Arancha González Laya** -MAEC-, **José Segura Clavell** -Casa África- and **Mayor General Ofori** -KAIPTC-): Spain's special commitment, in the framework of the European Union's foreign policy, to improving security in the Sahel, which requires, in addition to maintaining and reinforcing

cooperation and already significant presence in the military and police fields, a broad approach to development initiatives in harmony with the local population beyond the strictly security-related, and knowledge from the African side of the attention to be paid on the ground to this potential spread of instability towards the coastal countries of West Africa).

The seminar looked at this concept from three angles, which are outlined below in the form of conclusions and the main contributions of the panelists and experts convened for the occasion:

VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND MILITARY-POLITICAL COOPERATION

- In statistical terms, it is clear that the situation of political violence in the Sahel is a worrying factor from both a quantitative and qualitative point of view. Not only because of the increasing number and impact on victims and forced displacements of the presence of organisations linked to violent extremism such as JNIM (The Support Group for Islam and Muslims-the environment for groups linked to al-Qaeda) and ISWAP (Islamic State in the West African Province), but also because of the worrying rise in the number of victims and human rights violations as a result of incidents led by the security forces and self-defence militias, which are sometimes armed and financed by the region's governments. (J.Luengo Cabrera-International Organization for Migration). Spanish and African experts agreed in this respect that it is also evident that there is a problem of governance of large territories in which the state is absent and of the management of national military and police responses, especially in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, where international political-military cooperation is actively working on the provision and training of the armed and security forces.

- One of the biggest concerns among the experts and participants stems from the porosity of the borders in the region, especially in the "three-frontier region" between Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger. Large

areas that have little police and military surveillance -in means, personnel and supply logistics-, together with an insufficient intelligence network to control them (**Michael Ohene-Effah**).

- We observe a worrying process of instrumentalisation of inter-community conflicts in the Sahel by terrorist groups, which take advantage of the existing socioeconomic tensions in the face of a growing scarcity of resources and the shortcomings and dysfunctions of the states to project their own discourse. In a complex regional environment of violence perpetrated by very diverse actors, this phenomenon is fuelled, among many others, by processes of conflict and radicalisation that impact on areas of the Peul communities, raising the need to address security in the region in a comprehensive manner based on development, governance and human rights. At the same time, we must avoid unfair attitudes of discrimination and stigmatization of Peul communities not only in the Sahel but also in large parts of West and Central Africa, which increase the risks of regional destabilization and violate basic principles of human dignity. (**Julio Herráiz** -EME Sahel).

- New forms of violence are emerging in the Sahel that cannot be studied from a reductionist view of religious extremism. The resource of space and identity, ethnicity in the current historical context, leadership; the relationship of the local community with the Nation-State; the management of resources in a territory where identities and their link to the territorial space go beyond ideologies are crucial to understanding the production of violence. In the case of Mali, for example, its peace process and stability do not depend so much on the presence of international or regional armed forces as on the local actors in whom the balance of peace and violence lies. Violence in Mali and on the neighbouring borders is local, which makes it much more difficult to eradicate. (**Beatriz Mesa** -UNIR).

- Concern about the spread of instability from the Sahel to the coastal countries of West Africa is an issue which, although it has not yet translated into widespread instability in the countries mentioned

(Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, Benin and Togo), is being actively monitored, especially in the border regions. It is now that these countries must redouble their efforts to improve their intelligence networks and increase border control facilities in these areas in order to dissuade organisations of violent extremism from using these territories (**Lydia Amedzrator** -KAIPTC-).

- There are clear indications and knowledge of the use by violent extremist organisations of distribution networks - financial, logistical and human resources - with these countries and of the intention to take advantage of the logistical benefits of access to the sea and its consequent transport networks. There are indications of the use by these organisations of these channels for the supply of motorbikes (ideal vehicle in the region for the characteristics of the violent actions of these groups), trafficking of livestock from the Sahel to Ghana and Ivory Coast to generate economic resources, increasing the transit of fertiliser products (use for the manufacture of explosives) and control of artisanal gold mines to generate financing, which ends up in the commercial networks of countries such as Benin or Togo (**Sampson Kwarkye** -ISS-).

- Spain, as the European Union country that contributes the largest number of military and police personnel to joint missions in the region, is unquestionably committed to the situation in the Sahel. West Africa is Spain's "advanced frontier" (**General García-Vaquero**), and as such the response must be tailored to the commitment. The institutional fragility of these states makes the presence of international cooperation in security matters essential. Mention should be made of the presence in missions such as the EUTM-Mali or with projects such as the GAR-SI Sahel, which is led by Spain and has a growth potential as the number of African missions created has doubled from 7 to 14 (**General Espinosa** -GAR-SI Sahel). This experience is transferable in some aspects to the coastal countries of West Africa. However, the commitment in military matters is not the only existing one. All the Spanish actors and

experts agree on the need for an approach based on the inseparable link between security and development and on active participation, at this time even from leadership, in initiatives that are fully focused on development, such as the Sahel Alliance (**Minister Arancha González Laya).**

- African institutions are aware of the Spanish effort, assume the complexity of the moment and show the commitment of active work towards improving the situation. ECOWAS has an entire architecture designed to address the serious problems of instability in the Sahel region, in addition to a long experience in peacekeeping and political mediation in conflicts in the region. It is worth mentioning here the important role of ECOWAS in the conflict in Mali, particularly following this summer's coup d'état and the Ouagadougou summit of September 2019, which agreed on an anti-terrorist strategy for the region. They also participate in the Sahel Strategy and actively support the G-5 Sahel Joint Force, an initiative that calls for all possible support and reinforcement from outside in view of the reality of the moment (**Colonel Dieng** - ECOWAS).

RADICALISATION AS A KEY FACTOR NI THE SPREAD OF VIOLENCE

- The experts agree that the 'drivers' of radicalisation in the Sahel region, leading to the reinforcement of groups that practice Violent Extremism (VA), are always diverse and complex, combining socio-economic factors with those of the local dynamics of each territory.

- Widespread local communal conflicts, youth unemployment, ungoverned spaces, lack of control of part of the territory, state impunity and human rights abuses have increased vulnerability to radicalisation. Unless there is a significant change to focus more on governance, inclusion and job creation measures, the region risks being overwhelmed by radicalised youth who essentially seem to have lost faith in their states and their ability to turn the situation

around. From this approach, therefore, the possibilities of achieving sustainable benefits in the Sahel depend on addressing the threat "from a human security perspective", protecting the civilian population and their livelihoods. That it incorporates, in short, development initiatives that would be more useful "than any security programme" that is implemented (**Mutaru Mumuni Muqtar**).

- The Internet and the increased access to social networks by young people in the region is a fundamental factor in understanding the current radicalization trends, due to the recruitment techniques developed by terrorist groups. Therefore, technological tools also constitute a powerful deterrent in the opposite direction, and as such, work must be done to build a narrative of peace that is accessible to young people, the majority population in the region (**Ousseynou Gueye** - Timbuktu Institute-).

THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN WEST AFRICA

- In the framework of the 20th anniversary of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, it was very appropriate and enriching to include a panel on the powerful role that women can and should play in the resolution of conflicts in the Sahel and the whole of West Africa. The region has historically been a pioneer in the incorporation of women into peace processes (Sierra Leone and Liberia), but at the moment the conflict in the Sahel does not allow us to see that necessary role of women which contributes so much to conflict resolution.

- African women have been systematically excluded from peace negotiations and post-conflict peace-building. In many cases, women have prepared outstanding proposals to address internal displacement, sexual violence, abuses by government security forces and rebels, and the rebuilding of social services, but they have mostly been ignored. In light of this, and among other things,

there is a need to put gender advisors and human rights officers on the ground; to implement projects for maternal health care, girls' education, micro-enterprise and support for women's civil society groups; and to insist that women participate fully in all humanitarian and reconstruction programmes. (**Cristina Gallach** - SEAEIC).

- One of the most interesting perspectives for promoting greater participation of women in peace processes is to begin to integrate a greater number of women into the security forces of West African countries and into international peace missions, for which there is already a project from the G-5 Sahel that is beginning to bear fruit. The task, she explains, faces the challenge of the traditional roles assigned to women in the region's societies. (**Aminata Ndiaye** -Gender Advisor G-5 Sahel-).

- In the fight against radicalism it is essential to rely on women, both from civil society and from the public authorities, as they can have a great deal of influence from a religious perspective, in order to build a peaceful discourse and be able to influence their environments at all levels. In Africa, women play a fundamental role in the education of their children, from where they exert an essential influence on future generations. Community radio stations throughout West Africa are also elements with great potential and proven impact for spreading anti-radicalisation discourses. (**Mariame Sy** -Ambassador of Senegal to Spain-).

- Enhancing the role of women in conflict resolution is related to contributing more to their empowerment in other fields: economic, political, academic, armed forces, media. Women must be more involved in both institutional and traditional conflict resolution mechanisms, which are often undervalued. But their relevance is certain, as terrorist organisations have among their priority objectives to eliminate the people (traditional authorities, elders) who make up the organisation. For this reason, it is

important to re-recognise these traditional mechanisms (and the role of women in them), through anthropological analyses of the cultural, religious and social keys of each specific context, to be carried out above all by African researchers. (**Alberto Virella** - EME III Plan Africa-).

- It is essential to include women in preventive work in West Africa, and to consider its implementation "more from the base, from the communities, and less from the boardrooms and the various commissions of each agency". Bottom-up work is critical to women's empowerment and protection, including in the prevention of violence against women. Experience shows that it is from communities that women are empowered and enabled to effectively exercise these beneficial leadership roles by being aware of and clearly articulating their responsibility within the group. (**Jeane Osei-Tutu** – KAIPTC-).

This activity has received a subsidy from the General Secretariat for Defence Policy of the Ministry of Defence.

Translation: Elvira González-Sosa Suárez.