

Security Council Consultations on Mali

Briefing by El-Ghassim Wane, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Mali

29 October 2021

Mr. President,

Members of the Security Council,

1. Thank you for this opportunity to join the Security Council in taking stock of the situation in Mali.
2. Let me first express my deep appreciation for your visit to the country last week, which not only underscored the Council's continued support for Mali at this critical juncture but also demonstrated your unwavering and attentive support for MINUSMA. The tribute you paid to the 243 fallen MINUSMA peacekeepers was a stark reminder of the sacrifices made over the last eight years in the search for peace in Mali. It further enhanced our resolve to ensure that every one of those lives lost was not in vain.

Mr. President,

3. As you heard first-hand, the situation on the ground remains extremely challenging. We are confronting a context marked by increased insecurity in northern, central and now southern Mali; and a worrying humanitarian situation with 4.7 million people in need of humanitarian assistance and some 400,000 IDPs, half of whom have been displaced in the Central region. Attacks targeting both Malian and international forces, including MINUSMA peacekeepers, have continued unabated. Just yesterday, our camp in Aguelhok came under indirect mortar/rocket fire. Six projectiles were fired at the camp by unknown assailants, two of which

landed inside the camp. Luckily, there were no casualties or damages. In addition, political uncertainty persists, as Mali grapples with the completion of the Transition.

Mr. President,

4. Against this backdrop, the Government seized the opportunity of your visit, to loudly and clearly, express its concerns and priorities. Your various interlocutors highlighted the deteriorating security situation as the main concern for the average Malian, a concern I have heard over and over again, along with a plea for the delivery of basic service, during my own interactions with local communities in Gao, Menaka, Mopti, Douentza, Bandiagara, Aguelhok, Tessalit and, most recently in Timbuktu, where I was on Monday. They also insisted on the need for profound political and governance reforms to create conditions for credible elections and lasting stability.

5. Needless to reiterate that, in this context, MINUSMA remains crucial in Mali. The Mission operates under robust rules of engagement and is using all means necessary to implement its mandate, including in coordination with the Malian authorities and international partners. The Mission has also significantly adapted to the evolving and highly complex threat environment in Mali to protect civilians, including now in the Centre.

6. Today, we conduct our operations with more tailored units, including explosive ordinance disposal teams, quick reaction forces and ISR capabilities. We have also established temporary operating bases and launched long-range reconnaissance patrols. These include the conduct of daily patrols in the circle of Douentza in the Center, to prevent attacks by terrorist armed groups against villagers; patrols along main roads to ensure

freedom of movement and deter further terrorist attacks on key infrastructure, including bridges; and the stationing of a Temporary Operating Base in Ogassagou to prevent further violence between local communities. This ToB has also enabled the civilian components of MINUSMA to undertake mediation and reconciliation activities culminating, a few weeks ago, in the signing of a comprehensive peace agreement between 12 villages that provides for the free movement of people, the resumption of livelihood activities and return of social services. We are also holding our ground in Mali's far North, with our camps in Aguelhok and Tessalit, and doing so under difficult conditions. These efforts have been recognized by the Malian authorities and reassured the population particularly in the Centre.

7. We are also doing our best to support the Malian authorities in their efforts to address the deteriorating security situation. Between May and October of this year alone, we have responded to a myriad of requests for support from the Government of Mali and the Malian Defence and Security Forces in terms of rations, fuel, ground and air transport and engineering services. MEDEVAC and CASEVAC support have proved especially crucial to FAMa security operations across the country.

8. However, we are overstretched. Indeed, all of these activities are being undertaken within existing resources. It is in this context that the Secretary-General recommended an augmentation to our operation, including additional assets such as attack and utility helicopters, and it is up to the Council to decide on the way forward taking into consideration the concerns of our Malian host.

9. Meanwhile, let me also continue to insist that, irrespective of numbers, significant gaps remain in requirements for enabling capabilities, which are critical to ensure greater mobility and flexibility of the existing MINUSMA force. These gaps include military medium utility helicopter units, attack and armed helicopter units, forward surgical teams, infantry quick reaction force units, aerial intelligence collection assets, manned or unmanned, without which our effectiveness in delivering on our priority tasks will be severely constrained.

10. I therefore renew my call on countries in a position to do so to help mobilize the required resources to make MINUSMA fit for purpose.

Mr. President,

11. While I have spent some time on detailing the military and security response to the crisis in Mali, the answer cannot be purely military. It will never be emphasized enough that addressing insecurity also requires a political response.

12. For the Centre, MINUSMA is supporting the Government's efforts to finalize a comprehensive strategy for the stabilization of the Centre while enhancing its protection of civilian's efforts . The strategy is expected to focus on the fight against radical groups and prioritize reconciliation as was done in Ogassagou, the return of State authority, the provision of basic services and strengthening the resilience and participation of women and youth. I commend the Government for the commitment displayed towards the development of this strategy.

13. Regarding the 2015 peace agreement, progress has been frustratingly slow on the key provisions as they relate to DDR, institutional reforms and development in the North. However, in recent weeks there have been some encouraging evolutions. Earlier this month, the Government tabled a forward leaning proposal on disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR), most notably the integration of 13,000 combatants of the signatory movements by the end of this year. This is, in our view, a significant step forward in a process which has largely been at a standstill for the past 6 years. The international community should welcome this proposal and encourage the parties to engage in good faith discussions, including by convening the envisaged high-level decision-making meeting to agree on a way forward. In the meantime, the Accelerated DDR, for which 1800 combatants out of 3000 have been integrated, should be completed without any further delay. I also note the signing of a convention for the 16 projects elaborated as part of the sustainable development fund, as well as the steps being taken to involve the signatory movements in the institutional reform process. Moreover, there is a greater openness from the signatories for the International Mediation, under the leadership of Algeria as Chef de File, to play a more active role, including by exercising its arbitration role.

Mr. President,

14. The Transition has reached a critical stage.. As they indicated in meetings with you, the transition authorities hold the view that improving the security situation and initiating some fundamental reforms, including operationalizing the single electoral management body and responding to

their people's aspirations to better governance, accountability and justice, are key to the holding of credible elections and ensuring that the return to constitutional rule and stability is not short lived. In this respect, mention should be made of the Revision Annuelle des Listes Electorales (RALE) launched since 1 October, the ongoing work on the draft electoral law, and issuance of three decrees concerning the Assises Nationales de la Refondation (ANR), including its terms of reference and appointment of members to be involved in oversight and organizing committees.

15. In light of the current challenges facing Mali, it is critical that Mali's partners work closely with the Malians to facilitate a consensus, both on the reforms to be undertaken and on the conditions for the proper holding of elections, that would mark the return to constitutional order. For its part, MINUSMA is already providing substantive support to electoral management bodies, through the UN's integrated electoral team comprised of relevant Mission components, UNDP and UN Women, including the operationalization of the single electoral management body, and is prepared to provide holistic support to the *Assises Nationales de la Refondation*. Moreover, through my good offices, and in conjunction with ECOWAS and the African Union representatives, we will continue to advocate for frank dialogue amongst national stakeholders to arrive at political consensus on the way forward, while also working to ensure greater synergy of efforts between Mali and its partners towards the shared goal of return to constitutional rule and promise of lasting stability.

16. Finally, Mr. President, I would say that what you heard from the Malian authorities earlier this week was a plea to have a shared vision on how to

put Mali back on a path to peace and stability. Despite our collective efforts, the reality is that the security situation has deteriorated and the crisis deepening. However, all is not lost. We have an opportunity now to reflect and come to a shared understanding of the situation in front of us, review how we work together, detail our respective roles and responsibilities, including seeking greater accountability from all concerned . I believe if we commit to this approach, we could promote a shared vision among the Malians and their partners that would form the basis of a more coordinated international strategy to restore security, promote inclusive dialogue, complete the Transition and fully implement the 2015 peace agreement. For our part, let me assure you that MINUSMA will continue to reassess and recalibrate its approach to better support the Malian people's aspirations for peace and stability.

I thank you for your attention.