

STATEMENT BY AMBASSADOR MANJEEV SINGH PURI, ACTING PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE,
BRIEFING : SITUATION IN THE SAHEL REGION AT THE UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL ON
DECEMBER 10, 2012

Thank you, Mr. President,

Let me at the outset, welcome you to the Security Council, and congratulate the delegation of Morocco for arranging today's meeting. Your personal presence here, Excellency, and that of other dignitaries clearly underscore the importance of the evolving situation in the Sahel region for peace and security in the region.

2. I would also like to thank Secretary General Ban Ki Moon and Special Envoy Romano Prodi for their briefings. We hope that today's deliberations will help the United Nations in addressing the multifaceted crisis in the Sahel in an integrated and comprehensive manner, as has been mentioned in the useful concept note prepared by your delegation.

3. Mr. President, the Sahel region has long faced several challenges in the political, economic and humanitarian spheres. Many countries in the region are also confronted with governance issues due to the absence of adequate institutional capacity. Over the past year, the situation has aggravated due to the crisis in the neighborhood, as is most acutely shown by the developments in Mali. The proliferation of weapons, activities of rebel and terrorist groups, and transnational organized crimes, including illicit drug trafficking, have taken a heavy toll on the region.

4. Apart from the political and security problems, the humanitarian situation in the region has also worsened due to extreme climatic conditions and insufficient rainfalls that have negatively affected the agricultural harvest. More than 18 million people in the region are suffering from severe food and nutrition crises this year.

5. Extremist and terrorist groups have taken advantage of the adverse political, security and humanitarian situations, and are consolidating their position, particularly in the northern Mali. These groups have weakened the State institutions, indulged in serious human rights violations, and damaged and destroyed many sites of cultural, historic and religious significance. Activities of Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Ansar Dine and Boko Haram in the northern Mali has turned the area into a regional hub of terrorist groups. Several countries in the region are seriously threatened by their activities. More than 400,000 have been displaced by the fighting in the northern Mali.

6. Clearly, the time has come for the international community to seriously address the multiple crises in the Sahel and support the initiatives of regional and sub-regional organizations. Given the complexity of challenges facing the region, the response requires a holistic approach. The United Nations should play the leading role in the process, and we appreciate the Secretary General's initiatives like the High Level Meeting on the Sahel in September this year and the appointment of the Special Envoy. We look forward to the Secretary General's report on an integrated strategy for the Sahel, as requested by the Security Council. We think that the strategy should be developed with the full involvement of the countries in the Sahel and the regional and sub-regional organizations, such as the African Union, ECOWAS, CENSAD, and the Arab Maghreb Union.

7. In the immediate term, the priority should be the stabilization of the security situation. This requires dealing with the threats of secessionist, extremist and Al Qaida-linked terrorist groups. Political dialogue should be pursued with those willing to renounce terrorism and lay down arms. A secure environment will also facilitate the implementation of programmes for national reconciliation and delivery of humanitarian assistance.

8. We, therefore, support an expeditious response from the Security Council to the request of ECOWAS and the AU for the deployment of an African-led International Support Mission in Mali (AFISMA). The deployment of AFISMA should be in parallel to an inclusive political process led by the Malian authorities to address the legitimate grievances of the people in the northern Mali. We also urge the international community to redouble its efforts to meet the challenges of food insecurity in the northern Mali and provide adequate resources to the humanitarian agencies working in the region.

9. Given the expanding activities of terrorist networks and armed groups in the region, the United Nations should also assist the affected countries in strengthening the capacities of security agencies and in enhancing cooperation at the regional level towards more effective border control, combating illicit trafficking in arms and drugs and organized crime and terrorism.

10. Mr. President, the implementation of all strategies should give primacy to national ownership by capacity building of national institutions, and respect the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of the countries concerned. Apart from the provision of resources, there should be better integration and coordination among the UN and other agencies on the ground to ensure effective implementation of the strategy.

11. In conclusion, Mr. President, the renewed attention of the international community on the Sahel is a welcome development. We expect this attention to translate into concrete action on the ground to address the challenges. India, on its part, remains committed to partner with the countries in the region, the UN, the AU and other organizations in the implementation of an UN-led integrated strategy for the Sahel.

I thank you.

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