



Permanent Mission of Guatemala to the United Nations
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**STATEMENT OF AMBASSADOR GERT ROSENTHAL, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF GUATEMALA
TO THE UNITED NATIONS AT THE SECURITY MINISTERIAL MEETING ON THE SITUATION IN THE SAHEL
(10 December 2012)**

Mr. President,

Allow me at the outset to thank you for having convened this important meeting on the situation in the Sahel region. I appreciate your personal attendance to preside our debate. I also wish to extend an apology from our Minister of Foreign Affairs, H.E. Harold Caballeros, for not having joined you in this event, as was his intention and desire. Unfortunately, last-minute conflicts in his agenda impeded it. Most especially, I would like to express our appreciation for the concept paper that your delegation circulated among us (/2012/906); this paper offers important guidelines to organize today's debate.

I also wish to thank the Secretary-General, the Special Envoy for the Sahel and the High Commissioner for Refugees for their statements. I listened with interest as well to the statements of the Ministers of Cote d'Ivoire, the Republic of Chad and the Secretary-General of the Arab Maghreb Union.

Mr. President,

The topic that you have selected for our debate could not be more relevant. In the Sahel region we have a confluence of problems which include recurrent droughts and their resulting famines, periodic locust plagues, extreme poverty, migrations and internal as well as trans-boundary displacement of persons. To these we must add phenomena that we have explored lately in this Council, and in diverse contexts, and which tend to be of universal interest. I am referring, for example, to the illicit activities associated with organized crime, and also the consolidation of sanctuaries for terrorist organizations. Further, events in the SAHEL are not unrelated to the Libyan crisis of 2011, as we were reminded by an assessment mission of the Secretariat whose report was presented to us early this year (S/2012/42). Consequently, the thematic breath of our debate is very wide. I would like to limit my comments to six brief points.

First, a few words about Mali, which is the center of attention of this Council, when the Sahel region is mentioned. This is where we are closest to the threshold of a threat to international peace and security. The disruption of the Constitutional order last March led to predictable consequences. Long-standing demands for greater autonomy from Tuareg ethnic groups in the North were accentuated, and now nothing less than the territorial integrity of Mali is being tested. In the vacuum caused in the system of governance, extremist armed groups have made impressive gains. Sanctuaries

have appeared where terrorist groups and criminal cartels can operate freely. A regime of grave human-rights violations against the local population has emerged, religious and cultural monuments are being destroyed, and, as a result, a humanitarian crisis of the first order has been sparked. All this occurs in an ample geographical area which at the present time is a no-man's-land. In addition, and given the multiple links that exist between the countries in the SAHEL (and also in the Maghreb), the chaotic situation prevalent in the North of Mali has the enormous risk of spilling over into neighboring States. That is why we support a robust reaction of this Council to address the situation, in the general direction of the proposal prepared for us by the Secretary-General only a few days ago (S/2012/894).

That takes me to my second point, and it is the following: in addition to the singular characteristics of the SAHEL, the region offers a new opportunity to draw lessons from the diverse modalities of partnership between the United Nations and African multilateral entities, under Chapter VIII of the Charter. As is well known, at least in the Malian situation the first reaction originated in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), itself supported by the African Union. As occurred in so many other cases – Darfur, Somalia, the Democratic Republic of Congo – partnerships were forged between the United Nations and regional and/or sub-regional institutions which offer very important potential benefits, based on the comparative advantages of each party, but that also give rise to potential difficulties, around the eternal problem of “who does what”, how the chain of command and control functions in a complex peace-keeping operation, and who picks up the bill. In the case of Mali, in principle we welcome this type of partnership, but without compromising the functions which the Charter clearly assigns to this Security Council.

Third, in the SAHEL, and particularly in the North of Mali, the international community jointly, and especially the countries of the region, face new challenges from extremist armed groups, which utilize violence against innocent civilians to further their own destructive agenda. Given the size of the territory affected, there is the threat of establishing sanctuaries for groups such as Al Qaeda, the Movement of the Unity of Jihad in West Africa, Ansar Dine and Boko Haram. It is thus a priority to prevent the setting up of sanctuaries for those groups, which in turn requires the Malian Government to re-establish control of all of its territory. We support the backing of the international community of this endeavor.

Fourth, we are extremely concerned about the reports of gross human rights violations of the civilian population living in surrounding areas where extremist groups are operating. Extrajudicial executions, amputations, beatings, rape, kidnappings, and recruitment of child soldiers seem to be standard fare in communities that had previously been characterized by good-neighborliness and tolerance. This same circumstance has provoked a mass exodus of populations which is giving rise to a new humanitarian crisis, just as the previous crisis attributable to climatic conditions was abating somewhat. This is another way of saying that humanitarian assistance continues to be a priority topic in the SAHEL, and we commend the Regional Humanitarian Assistance Coordinator for SAHEL as well as the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance (OCHA) for their activities in this regard.

Fifth, there also are local and transnational groups dedicated to organized crime in the SAHEL, including the trafficking of illicit drugs, trafficking of arms, trafficking of persons and contraband. We explored this topic last February, under the Presidency of Togo, as referred to West Africa, which even gave rise to a resolution (2039 (2012)). We can relate to the need to combat this scourge, which requires solid international cooperation, since the Central American countries in general and Guatemala in particular face this same challenge.

Lastly, given the complex and multi-faceted characteristics of the situation faced by the SAHEL – challenges of security, governance, development, human rights, drought, famine, malnutrition, high levels of displaced persons and refugees, an interrupted school-cycle, scarcity of basic goods, all added to the conflict in Mali – it is clear that an integrated and coordinated approach on the part of the United Nations System is required. It is for this reason that we anxiously await as soon as possible the presentation of the Integrated Strategy of the United Nations for the SAHEL that we requested last July (paragraph 28 of resolution 2056 (2012)). We trust that this document, with its revisions, will offer the road-map for its subsequent implementation.

Due to all of the above, we also call on all international stakeholders, regional and sub-regional organizations, and partners in development to redouble their efforts to provide support and assistance to all the countries of the SAHEL.

Thank you.