

**Task Force *Takuba*: political statement by the governments of Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Mali, Niger, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Sweden and the United Kingdom.**

The security situation in Mali, and more broadly in the Sahel, remains a major concern. Despite constant engagement by national, regional and international forces, organized armed groups keep destabilizing large parts of Mali and are now present in Niger and Burkina Faso. Recent attacks in the three-border region, where the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS)/Daesh is challenging the Sahelian states authority, has forced the regional authorities and the international community to focus more efforts on this area.

Meanwhile, the humanitarian situation is progressively deteriorating. Large numbers of locals have been forced to flee their homes and to relocate due to intimidation by terrorists. Attacks from organized armed groups conducting terrorist activities have already claimed the lives of many civilians, as well as national and international troops. This situation claims a high cost in human suffering. It also shed lights on the need to uphold the respect for human rights and international humanitarian law in the region.

A robust integrated approach is needed to reverse current negative trends and address root causes to instability in Mali and the Sahel region. Strengthened security enables conditions for the development efforts in Mali, improved governance and respect for the rule of law, which in turn are necessary to achieve sustainable peace. Ownership and unity of efforts by the governments, the civil society and the population in the region are crucial. Stopping the influence of organized armed groups conducting terrorist activities on the ground in order to support efficiently the efforts of Sahelian partners is also crucial for Europe. Solidarity and cooperation with regional governments are necessary in order to protect the security and interests of both Europe and the Sahel.

In order to counter and degrade terrorist resilience, and to accompany the efforts of operation Barkhane and the G5 Sahel Joint Force, an effective and tailored response is of vital importance.

Engagement in the Sahel needs to be coherent and include security, governance, development and humanitarian efforts. The “Coalition for the Sahel” will contribute as a framework for strategic and political engagement with the Sahel, underlining that complementary effort need to be pursued in the other pillars. At the request of the Malian and Nigerien authorities, BELGIUM, CZECH REPUBLIC, DENMARK, ESTONIA, FRANCE, GERMANY, the NETHERLANDS, NORWAY, PORTUGAL, SWEDEN and the UNITED KINGDOM politically support the creation of a task force, integrated to the command of operation Barkhane, aiming at tackling the terrorist groups in the Liptako region. Under the name of *Takuba*, this task force will be mainly composed of European Special Operation Forces supported by key enablers providing a high level of autonomy. It will advise, assist and accompany Malian Armed Forces, in coordination with G5 Sahel partners, the UN mission (MINUSMA) and EU missions (EUTM Mali, EUCAP Mali and EUCAP Niger), with a robust legal basis in compliance with international law. We welcome any contribution, as already declared by BELGIUM, DENMARK, ESTONIA, FRANCE, the NETHERLANDS and PORTUGAL, as well as the planned contribution by SWEDEN (pending parliamentary approval) and call for additional commitments to this common European effort aiming at strengthening security, governance, development and the respect for human rights in Mali and the region, as well as increasing international security.

Task Force *Takuba* is planned to have an initial operational capability (IOC) by the summer of 2020 and expected to become operational (FOC) by early 2021. Task Force *Takuba* is envisaged to act swiftly and to adapt to the evolving threat represented by terrorist groups and will play a key role in rapidly empowering local armed forces.