

United Nations  
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Remarks for Mr. Gerald Mitchell

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AU Policy Forum

Regional Approaches to Dealing with Armed Groups in the Sahel

Addis Ababa, 19-20 November 2024

*Old Conference Center, Committee Room 1, African Union*

The Director for Governance and Conflict Prevention of the African Union  
Commission / the AU High Representative to Chad,

The Representative of the Lake Chad Basin Commission,

The Representative of the German Embassy,

Esteemed colleagues,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

First, I would like to thank the African Union for organizing this policy forum on “Regional Approaches to Dealing with Armed Groups in the Sahel”, as part of the joint project together with the Bonn International Center for Conflict Studies (BICC) and the United Nations, and funded by the German Federal Foreign Office.

It is good to see such a diverse group of policy makers and experience represented in this timely event, who are all involved in planning responses targeting armed groups in border areas on the African continent.

Today, the number of armed conflicts across the globe is at an historic high. Conflict-related deaths, as well as internal displacement, continue to increase. The evolving nature of armed conflicts are significantly more complex. Among the factors for this are the plethora of non-state armed groups and mercenaries, cross-border activities and complex regional dynamics, which are compounded by the effects of climate change, the spread of violent extremism, and the proliferation of weapons.

There is a need to constantly adapt interventions to conflict realities. Above all, it is important to understand and include local perspectives in addressing the threat from armed groups. In this context, it is essential to promote national ownership and leadership, and underscore State sovereignty, in establishing the legal, institutional and policy frameworks for dealing with the wide range of armed groups.

This means that there is a need for joint analysis, planning and implementation across national and international actors to ensure coherent, well-coordinated and complementary interventions. The event today, contributes towards this goal, as part of the ongoing collaboration between the UN and the AU. In the context of the UN-AU Joint Framework for Enhanced Partnership in Peace and Security, DDR is highlighted as one of the areas for strengthened collaboration under addressing root causes of conflict.

The AU DDR Capacity Program (AUDDRCP) is a good example of this collaboration. This program, initiated in 2013, between the AU, the UN and the World Bank Group, focuses on creating sustainable DDR capacities within the AU, the RECs/RMs and Member States, to support national and regional DDR initiatives. The current focus of the program, also of particular relevance to Lake Chad Basin, is on: 1) **operational support** - how to strengthen operational partnerships to ensure the in-built success of interventions; 2) **political aspects of DDR** - how to make sure that political dynamics underlying DDR processes are duly considered; and 3) **the role of DDR in conflict prevention** – how to strengthen national capacities to promote and implement prevention efforts and address conflict drivers.

It is important to realize that efforts to manage armed groups have expanded beyond post-conflict settings and encompass the entire peace continuum, from prevention and conflict resolution to peacekeeping, peacebuilding, and sustainable development. For DDR to have an optimal result in sustaining peace and security, I would like to highlight three key elements.

First, **DDR should be part of conflict prevention.** The Pact for the Future also advocates for the strengthening of national capacities to promote and implement prevention efforts and address conflict drivers, including through sharing of best practices and lessons learned. In this context, the role of communities as part of, for example, Community Violence Reduction, is essential. In addition, overly rigid counterterrorism measures in isolation should be avoided, as it prevents the adoption of flexible and complementary approaches, and often discourages Governments from exploring peacebuilding, conflict resolution as well as preventive measures.

Second, **DDR processes should be guided by applicable measures (judicial and non-judicial) as well as policy and institutional frameworks,** including for handling cases of former members of terrorist groups. Such aspects enable the implementation of Transitional Justice frameworks, DDR processes and accountability mechanisms. In addition, DDR processes should include continuous monitoring and evaluation systems to ensure that DDR is accountable for stated objectives.

Lastly, **DDR should be part of a comprehensive approach.** It is important to recognize the strong linkages between DDR and other aspects of a peace process, including

Security Sector Reform (SSR), Transitional Justice (TJ), socio-economic development, climate change, and the role of natural resources. A better understanding of dealing with armed groups, development of DDR processes and working towards sustainable peace, security and development, cannot be done in isolation.

The United Nations remains committed to further supporting the African Union in strengthening its capacity on DDR, whether in advisory, planning or implementing capacities. We are encouraged by the progress achieved since the start of the AUDDRCP, including the support of an AU DDR resource center. This aims to ensure that anyone and any entity involved in DDR on the African Continent can easily consult a vast resource of DDR expertise in Africa to get inspiration and guidance in their own work. As with all knowledge management processes, the resource center needs constant enrichment.

I hope that the results of your important work, including today, and a successful outcome, will eventually contribute to the knowledge of armed groups and benefit DDR processes all over Africa and beyond.

Thank you.

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