

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

February 4, 2022

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
The President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We write to you to express our concerns with the deteriorating humanitarian, political, and security situation in the Sahel, and the urgency for developing and implementing an effective and comprehensive strategy. We also urge you to soon appoint a seasoned diplomat with experience in Sub-Saharan Africa as Special Envoy to the Sahel to help coordinate U.S. diplomatic engagement, work with regional partners to implement a refreshed and balanced strategy and refocus U.S. support toward addressing the root causes of chronic violence, instability, and governance challenges.

The alarming trend of coups emerging across the Sahel region, including in Mali, Chad, Guinea, and Burkina Faso, some of which were carried out by U.S. and French trained and equipped military personnel, is a symptom of a larger issue surrounding U.S. and international policy toward the region. The global community, with leadership from the United States, needs a new approach that incorporates more holistic, long-term objectives centered around governance and institution building.

Prioritizing short-term security and military objectives, including counterterrorism, above longer-term policy priorities in the Sahel, West Africa, and elsewhere on the continent, fails to best promote our stated values of human rights and good governance, and fails to offer durable solutions to the growing security threat. Secretary Blinken stated last year at the G5 Sahel Summit that counterterrorism efforts alone are not enough to address these challenges and that instability and violence are often symptoms of damaged state legitimacy fueled by “historical social grievances, a lack of accessible public services, and exclusion from political processes – particularly for minority or marginalized communities.”¹

Violence persists, and is escalating in some cases, across the Sahel despite significant investments in security, governance, and economic development from national governments and the international community. The last two years have been particularly deadly for civilians in the Sahel, with attacks claiming more than 3,200 victims in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger. For roughly a decade, military deployments of African, French, European, and UN troops have not measurably reduced the terrorist threat, intercommunal violence, or other forms of conflict. Human

¹ <https://www.state.gov/video-remarks-to-the-g5-sahel-summit/>

rights violations and patterns of impunity in these countries instead fuel a narrative that intensifies a sense of disenfranchisement and grievance.

The Biden Administration's re-engagement with the international community, combined with stated objectives to reposition our core values of human rights and multilateralism, offers an opportunity to devise a new approach to the region. Adequate resources should be committed to help local, national, and regional partners address longstanding grievances through sustained investments in democracy, governance, civil society, and accountability. Importantly, active engagement with and amplification of credible voices from local communities must be central to the formulation and implementation of a new strategy for the region if it is to gain the necessary buy-in for success. We strongly recommend your Administration focus on identifying and addressing the complex challenges surrounding conflict and violence, improve the efficacy of assistance designed to reform national security sectors and institutions, and – given the anti-democratic trends in the region – strengthen governance, civil society, and accountability based on rigorous conflict analysis and diplomacy.

We look forward to working with the Administration on reforming our strategy and engagement with the region and the continent of Africa more broadly. In this context, we request the Administration evaluate its security sector assistance and other efforts in the Sahel over the last fifteen years to assess their efficacy and areas for improvement and brief Committee Members and staff on these efforts.

Thank you for your attention to this critical matter. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Sara Jacobs
Member of Congress



Gregory W. Meeks
Chair
House Foreign Affairs Committee



Karen Bass
Chair
Subcommittee on Africa, Global
Health, and Global Human Rights



Ilhan Omar
Member of Congress



Ami Bera, M.D.
Member of Congress

CC:

Antony Blinken, Secretary
U.S. Department of State

Samantha Power, Administrator
United States Agency for International Development

Lloyd Austin, Secretary
U.S. Department of Defense

Jake Sullivan, National Security Advisor