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And

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And

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“The Growing Crisis in Africa's Sahel Region”

Thank you very much Chairmen Smith, Poe, and Ros-Lehtinen, Ranking Members Bass, Deutch, and Sherman, and Members of the Committee; for the opportunity to testify before you on this important topic. The countries of the Sahel face a complex series of interconnected and ever-evolving challenges. The crisis in Mali, and security vacuum following the Libyan revolution, exacerbated the Sahel's longstanding political, economic and humanitarian vulnerabilities. Instability in Mali and increased arms flows from Libya into the region, collided with a humanitarian crisis brought on by drought and poor harvests in a region already burdened by chronic poverty and food insecurity.

Addressing the Sahel's intertwined security and humanitarian problems demands a comprehensive approach. We are working closely with regional countries and organizations to improve their capacity to secure porous borders and challenge terrorists and transnational criminal networks. The United States also continues to lead the robust international response to meet the needs of the Sahel's

most vulnerable people. Any short-term progress, however, could be jeopardized by the region's continued political and economic frailties, including persistently poor governance, weak institutions, and the lack of economic opportunities, particularly for youth. Building strong democratic institutions and promoting inclusive government and economic growth are at the center of our approach as we attempt to solidify security gains and restore stability to the Sahel and its people.

Crisis and Conflict in the Sahel

By extension, security in the Sahel and North Africa are inextricably linked. Porous borders and limited government presence and capacities mean that insecurity in one part of the region can quickly become a security threat in another. In 2011, one result of the Libyan revolution, among many others, was an increase in the flow of dangerous weapons and well-armed, experienced fighters into the Sahel. The collapse of Libyan security institutions caught the Sahel at an especially vulnerable time. In Mali, a rebellion in the north by heavily armed, primarily Tuareg rebel groups, together with weak governance in Bamako, corruption, and an ineffectual counterterrorism response, culminated in a March 2012 coup d'état. Terrorist and extremist groups, including al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), exploited the resulting political vacuum and seized control of the northern two-thirds of Mali. Terrorists enjoyed greater freedom of movement and, temporarily, access to a larger pool of potential recruits and training opportunities. At the same time, transnational criminal networks used well-established smuggling routes to increase their trafficking in weapons, drugs and people. Chad has been a steady route for illicit weapons trafficking out of Libya. However, the Chadian government, with State Department support, has

significantly increased its efforts to counter the illicit trafficking of advanced conventional weapons including man-portable air defense systems (MANPADS).

In the aftermath of the terrorist takeover of northern Mali, neighboring countries – including Mauritania, Burkina Faso, and Niger –intensified their own efforts to block violent extremists and criminal networks from expanding their operations into other parts of the region. The Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership (TSCTP) has been the United States’ primary vehicle to assist these and other countries in the region to improve their capacity to monitor and control border areas and improve their overall counterterrorism capability. TSCTP supports a coordinated and comprehensive U.S. government approach to building long-term security capacity in Algeria, Burkina Faso, Chad, Mauritania, Niger, Morocco, Nigeria, Senegal, and Tunisia. The program is designed to support partner and regional efforts to contain and marginalize terrorist organizations, disrupt efforts to recruit and train extremists, counter efforts to establish safe havens, and disrupt foreign fighter networks. Niger, Burkina Faso, Mauritania, and Chad are utilizing the training and equipment provided under TSCTP to contain the threat of AQIM and other extremist groups.

Sahel countries have played an active role in supporting the French and African-led military intervention that has pushed extremists back into isolated areas in northern Mali. Chad’s role in Mali has been significant. Chadian troops deployed using Chadian assets and have played a central role in counterterrorism operations. Both Burkina Faso and Niger have each contributed around 670 soldiers to the African-led International Support Mission in Mali (AFISMA) and have pledged to increase their troop contributions when appropriately-vetted elements of AFISMA transition into a UN peacekeeping operation in July 2013.

The United States is in the process of providing up to \$96 million to support AFISMA troop and police contributing countries, including Niger and Burkina Faso. Our support includes training, vehicles, communications equipment, and personnel equipment, which will help AFISMA contingents to transition from a regional force into effective UN peacekeepers.

While the French and African-led intervention successfully wrestled control of the majority of Malian territory from terrorists and weakened AQIM, continued asymmetric attacks against international and Malian forces in and around northern population centers illustrate that Mali and the region remain vulnerable to violent extremism. A stable and successful future in Mali depends on a coordinated approach to security, political, development, and humanitarian challenges. We firmly supported the adoption of United Nations Security Council Resolution 2100 (2013). The Resolution lays out a comprehensive approach to addressing the multifaceted crises in Mali – an approach that prioritizes not only the need to confront the immediate security challenges in Mali, but also stresses the need to restore democratic governance, implement an inclusive national dialogue, protect civilians, promote human rights, reform Mali’s security sector, deliver humanitarian assistance, and establish effective mechanisms for justice and accountability.

Addressing insecurity in Mali is only one piece of the Sahel’s security puzzle. Terrorists pushed out of Mali will show up in other ungoverned spaces. Instability in Libya and the lack of government control over its southern territory will continue to pose an ever-present threat to the Sahel. Porous borders and insufficient reach by security services makes the Mali – Niger – Libya corridor an area of concern because it can facilitate the movement of terrorist groups and

transnational criminal networks. We will continue to work with regional partners and organizations to build their capacity and improve regional cooperation to combat this shared threat.

Humanitarian Challenges

Responding to the instability in Mali and Libya alone would have presented an enormous challenge. Yet in the midst of the international community's response to this spike in regional instability, the Sahel faced a serious humanitarian crisis in 2012 brought on by a severe drought and failed harvests that put 18.7 million people at risk for food insecurity, including one million children at risk of severe acute malnutrition. Since the beginning of the conflict in Mali, more than 475,000 Malians have been displaced internally or across borders, further straining already stretched resources. Burkina Faso, Mauritania and Niger have generously welcomed some 175,000 refugees, despite their own food insecurity. The United States continues to lead the international response to this humanitarian crisis. Since Fiscal Year 2012, we have been providing over \$550 million in humanitarian assistance across the Sahel to address food insecurity and the needs of conflict-affected Malians, including refugees.

Early warning systems and a robust international response helped prevent a humanitarian catastrophe; but an estimated 10 million people remain at risk of food insecurity. Sadly, food shortages are nothing new for the arid Sahel, which has experienced debilitating, recurring droughts throughout its history. More attention is needed to alleviate chronic food insecurity and break the cycle of emergency assistance. USAID Assistant Administrator Nancy Lindborg will provide details on a new U.S. government initiative to build resilience throughout the Sahel.

Consolidating Gains: Building Governance and Inclusive Economic Growth

While the acute security and humanitarian challenges facing the Sahel today demand a robust international response, we must remember that our short-term successes may be fleeting if we fail to address the longstanding political and economic fragility that make the Sahel susceptible to persistent crisis and conflict. Poor governance, weak democratic institutions, and a lack of development and economic opportunity cultivate fertile ground for instability. Helping these countries to strengthen their institutions and be more responsive and inclusive is equally critical to addressing the region's deep-seated security, political and development challenges.

The Sahel remains vulnerable, but we are also seeing signs of progress throughout the region to improve governance, boost transparency and accountability, and promote inclusive economic growth. Niger has made measurable progress on political and economic reform since returning to democracy after a 2010 coup. In 2012, Niger achieved eligibility for a Millennium Challenge Corporation compact. There are also signs of progress in Burkina Faso, which in December 2012 held successful parliamentary elections that were judged free and fair by the international community. In Mauritania, long-delayed parliamentary elections are now scheduled for October 2013.

Promoting economic growth and development is also critical to putting the Sahel on a path to stability. Creating viable economic opportunities and meeting the basic needs of its citizens remain a daunting task for countries that consistently rank at the very bottom of any measure of human development. Ensuring

women's full participation in the economy is critical for countries to raise productivity, generate demand, and pull communities out of poverty. We are working with all our partners in the Sahel on a wide variety of economic, health, and education programs. In Burkina Faso, a five-year, \$481 million Millennium Challenge Corporation Compact, which is on track to successfully conclude in 2014, is reducing poverty through investments in roads, improved agricultural productivity, land use rights, and primary education. In Mauritania, the U.S. - North Africa Partnership for Economic Opportunity (NAPEO) is building a network of U.S. and North African business leaders, entrepreneurs, civil society and public sector leaders to foster job creation, regional cooperation, and entrepreneurship, with a focus on youth. Assistant Administrator Lindborg will have much more to share on our efforts to promote economic growth and development.

Comprehensive Solutions to Complex Problems

Addressing the complex and evolving security, political and humanitarian challenges in the Sahel demands a comprehensive regional and international approach. Under the leadership of Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Wendy Sherman, the State Department and USAID have convened a working group, chaired by the Deputy Assistant Secretaries of the Africa, Near East, and Counter Terrorism bureaus, that is conducting a thorough review of our approach to security in the Maghreb and Sahel to ensure that our regional and functional bureaus are effectively working together to address the region's interconnected challenges. Many of our partners, including the European Union, the United Kingdom, and France, are engaging in similar efforts to create multidimensional, Sahel-wide strategies, and we are coordinating closely to ensure a common and

complementary approach. The United States is also supporting the ongoing efforts of the UN Special Envoy for the Sahel, Romano Prodi, to develop an integrated UN strategy for tackling the region's multiple crises.

In closing, we must continue our efforts to approach the Sahel and the Maghreb's interconnected problems with a comprehensive regional and international effort. Such an effort must address the immediate security threat posed by violent extremists and transnational criminal networks, while at the same time building the institutional capacity needed to address the Sahel's political economic and humanitarian challenges.