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GRAND RENDEZ-VOUS FOR THE PREVENTION OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA: REALITIES AND PERSPECTIVES

The United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS), the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) of Switzerland and the Center for Advanced Defense and Security Studies (CHEDS) of Senegal organized in Dakar, from 28 February to 2 March 2023, the *Grand Rendez-vous for the prevention of violent extremism in West and Central Africa: realities and perspectives*.

Brigadier General Jean DIEME, Director General of the Center for Advanced Defense and Security Studies (CHEDS) of Senegal, H.E. Mr. Simon GEISSBÜHLER, Assistant State Secretary of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs of Switzerland, H.E. Mr. Jean-Antoine DIOUF, Chief of Staff for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Senegalese Diaspora, representing H.E. Ms. Aïssata TALL SALL, and Ms. Giovannie BIHA, Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations for West Africa and the Sahel, co-chaired the Grand Rendez-vous.

On the sidelines of this meeting, the High-Level panel provided an opportunity for H.E. Mr. Albert KAN-DAPAAH, Minister of National Security of Ghana, H.E. Mr. Gatta GALI N'GOTHE, Minister of State, Secretary General of the Presidency of the Republic of Chad and President of the Independent Monitoring and Evaluation Framework of the Sovereign and Inclusive National Dialogue - CISE, H.E. Mr. Maman Sambo SIDIKOU, High Representative of the African Union for Mali and the Sahel – MISAHEL, as well as Dr. Solomon Ayele DERSSO, Founder and Director of Amani Africa (Ethiopia), to review the experiences of their respective countries and institutions in terms of the prevention of violence. Reviewed elements included: the adoption of public policies, the establishment of dedicated structures, and the implementation of different initiatives for inclusive political dialogue.

From twenty countries in West and Central Africa, a hundred experts, representatives of governments and public institutions, national and local elected officials, defense and security forces, civil society members, women and youth communities, traditional and religious leaders, as well as representatives of regional and international organizations, took part in the meeting.

For three days, participants reviewed initiatives undertaken to prevent violent extremism, organized with reference to the United Nations Action Plan to Prevent Violent Extremism launched in 2015. The Grand Rendez-vous was also a space for reflection on ways to strengthen the prevention of violent extremism as a response to insecurity in West and Central Africa. During these reflections, the importance of fully mobilizing through strong political will, to address causes of violence was illustrated as a necessary approach to complement military and security responses.

The various analyses and recommendations resulting from the meeting have emphasized the need for systematic, concerted action by all relevant actors to determine the root causes of violence and work towards their reduction. Participants conveyed the importance of integrating perspectives on the prevention of violent extremism into the public policies and strategies of States, as well as regional organizations, in particular the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), and the African Union. They also stressed the need for support from multilateral and bilateral partners, such as UNOWAS and Switzerland, which, together with their Senegalese partner, facilitated this meeting.

The meeting highlighted the need for a combined commitment from all relevant actors, to promote a spirit of solidarity that can strengthen the links between States and citizens, within communities and between them, at national and local levels.

Concrete recommendations were made around the main measures that need to be strengthened. These included: permanent dialogue and public governance (in particular dialogue between politicians, populations and defence and security forces, the inclusion of women and young people in actions to prevent violent extremism, the role of defense and security forces as actors in the prevention of violence, the need to satisfy social justice requirements, and improved coordination around the definition and implementation of national and regional policies for prevention.

The final recommendations are contained in the **Summary of Conclusions** which will accompany this press release. In addition, a summary and results report of the Grand Rendez-vous will be published and disseminated promptly.

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