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G5 SAHEL SUMMIT: TOWARDS A JOINT FORCE?

On Monday, 6 February, the G5 Sahel heads of state met for their sixth extra-ordinary summit on the theme, “The security situation in Mali and its impact on the Sahel.” The meeting, which was organised in Bamako and included the participation of African Union President Alpha Condé, took place against a background in which the peace agreement is breaking down; there are persistent terrorist attacks and, in recent months, there have been many operations in neighbouring countries. Among the measures mentioned, the G5 leaders emphasised the implementation of a joint force. “We hope to soon have a clear mandate from the UN Security Council in order to allow this force, which was first planned during the N’Djamena summit [November 2015], to become truly operational,” said the President of Niger, Mahamadou Issoufou, at the end of the summit. “In our respective countries, the building blocks of this force are already in place. This is the case in the area between Chad and Niger. This is also the case for the three borders between Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger. It will soon be the case between Mauritania and Mali. We hope to attack the heart of the threat, and the heart of the threat is in Mali.” The implicit model for the joint force is the Lake Chad Basin’s Multinational Joint Force (MJK). The MJK is considered to be one of the keys to success in the fight against Boko Haram combatants. One of its added values has been that it set up a headquarters, which provided a framework to improve co-ordination between different parts of the joint force and with the forces that operate under national command. The example of the MJK, however, also highlights the difficulties inherent in the implementation of such a force, difficulties that go beyond the financial stakes that were put forward by the G5 Sahel leaders at the Bamako meeting. Despite some progress in recent years, some partners are still reluctant to trust the others, as evidenced by reactions in the Malian press about Mauritania’s commitment to fighting terrorist groups. In the same vein, even if a security response is necessary in this situation, we should not forget that a joint force on its own is not capable of addressing the problems that create terrorism.

► Find out + : www.presidence.ne/article/fin-du-sommet-du-g5-sahel-bamako-le-president-issoufou-mahamadou-se-rejout-des-conclusions
THE GAO ATTACK THREATENS MALI’S PEACE AGREEMENT

The murderous attack on the Joint Operational Mechanism base in Gao on 18 January threatens to undermine efforts to achieve peace in Mali. The attack, which killed nearly 80 people and injured more than 100, targeted a key feature of the Algiers peace agreement: joint patrols. These patrols, which bring together soldiers from the Malian military, members of the Co-ordination of Azawad Movements as well as from several militia groups, are aimed at securing areas that are currently beyond the control of authorities, particularly in the north. The patrols have been delayed several times since the agreement was signed in June 2015, and have long been the cause of a stalemate between stakeholders. The attack was claimed by the AQIM affiliated Al-Mourabitoune group, a group that the patrols were supposed to fight. The attack has also rekindled the atmosphere of distrust between the peace agreement stakeholders as they each accuse the others of complicity with the assailants. This renewed tension, combined with the impact of the attack on soldiers, could undermine the usefulness of these patrols before they even start. This weakening of the peace process should result in a revival of talks and negotiations, especially during the National Unity Conference that President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita announced for March 2017.


REFORMING CÔTE D’IVOIRE’S EDUCATION SYSTEM

While Côte d’Ivoire has recorded strong growth over the past five years, the country lags behind in education. The decade of crisis strongly affected the education system and the level of schooling in the country, exacerbating inequalities faced by girls, children from rural areas and children from poor families. Although the Ivorian government has recently embarked on education reforms, such as a measure providing free school for all children until the age of 16, the priority is to improve the efficiency of public spending on education, according to a recent World Bank report on Côte d’Ivoire’s skills challenge. The report makes a number of recommendations to achieve this goal and calls for: a reduction in administrative expenses, the purchase of equipment and the introduction of a more effective financial aid system for families.


BURKINA FASO: A DAM AGAINST FOOD INSECURITY

Burkina Faso’s Ministry of Agriculture and Water Development has kicked off the work on the hydro-agricultural aspect of its Project 1 of the Programme to build resilience to food and nutrition insecurity in the Sahel (P1-P2RS). The project, which is 85% financed by the African Development Bank, involves the construction of the Saria Dam and other hydraulic developments that will be good for agricultural production. In line with the objectives of the national agricultural policy, it aims to strengthen the food and nutrition security of the region and to combat unemployment and rural flight through the development of local value chains.

► Find out +: http://lefaso.net/spip.php?article75488
EXTENSIVE APE TRAFFICKING IN WEST AFRICA

A journalistic investigation conducted in 12 West African countries revealed extensive trafficking of the region’s protected wildlife. This traffic mainly involves apes, especially chimpanzees, which are sold as pets through a complex chain of intermediaries including poachers, traffickers, transporters and buyers. This illicit trade, which also involves ape massacres during the poaching phase, jeopardises the species involved, even though the damage is difficult to measure. The report suggests that the UN figures on great ape trafficking in the region, where 1,800 animals were officially seized between 2005 and 2011, are largely underestimated.

▶ Read the report: www.bbc.co.uk/news/resources/idt-5e8c4bac-c236-4cd9-bacc-db96d733f6cf

PUBLICATION: ASSESSMENT OF LEARNING OUTCOMES

The World Bank has published the results of a learning outcomes assessment that was carried out in 2014 in ten Francophone African countries, including seven in West Africa. This study is part of the Programme for the Analysis of Education Systems (PASEC), which the World Bank relies on to determine its interventions in the education field. It draws a picture of students’ levels in mathematics and in reading French. It reveals that, in general, there are still significant gender and social disparities when it comes to access to education in the region.


OPINION: RETHINKING PEACEKEEPING IN LIBERIA

The UN Security Council has established 30 March 2018 as the end the UN peacekeeping mission in Liberia (UNMIL), which has been deployed in the country since 2003. Since its arrival, the mission has: accompanied the country’s political transition, supported the process of national reconciliation and, more recently, contributed to the fight against the Ebola epidemic. The withdrawal, which will take place a few months after the October 2017 presidential election, will be an important transitional milestone for Liberia. It will also be an opportunity for the United Nations to implement its new approach to peacekeeping, which the Security Council adopted in 2015 on the basis of a report by the High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations. This approach involves considering peacekeeping at all stages of the conflict cycle, namely, emergence, escalation, continuation and recurrence, as well as putting in place other forms of engagement that are conducive to establishing a lasting peace. In the Liberian case, the transition still faces a number of challenges from justice and security to governance, economic development and social inclusion. In order to continue to help Liberia achieve these objectives after UNMIL’s departure, the new approach proposes to shift the UN mandate in three directions: to involve national actors more in organising the transition; to ensure sustainable and predictable financing after the mission’s departure; and to strengthen the co-operation of peace operations with other UN agencies and other national and regional partners. This approach is already at work, as witnessed by the organisation of a transition forum in Monrovia in October 2016, which brought together more than 100 national and international stakeholders, and whose findings were transmitted to the Peacebuilding Commission in New York.

▶ Find out +: https://theglobalobservatory.org/2017/01/sustaining-peace-liberia-unmil
Corruption remains a key challenge for West Africa.

The 2016 Corruption Perceptions Index, published by Transparency International, draws a disturbing picture of the perceived level of corruption in West Africa. Admittedly, the region has an average score that is slightly more positive (score 31.7) than that of sub-Saharan Africa as a whole (score 31). It also includes Cabo Verde, which is second on the list of best-rated African countries after Botswana. But in general, the situation is worrying. Of the 17 West African countries (including Chad and Mauritania), 13 rank in the bottom half of the table, and six of them in the last quarter. Seven countries regressed in the ranking compared to 2015, some dramatically. This is the case of Mauritania, which went down 30 places. This is also the case in Ghana, which is considered to be one of the most stable countries on the continent, but lost 16 places in the ranking. Corruption was at the heart of the debate during the last presidential election. The Gambia also lost 22 positions in the ranking.

However, the report does not yet take into account the final outcome of the presidential election crisis in January 2017. Apart from Cabo Verde, only Burkina Faso recorded a simultaneous improvement in its score and ranking – by four points and four places since 2015. This performance is encouraging for the country’s on-going democratic transition.

Minata Samate-Cessouma is a graduate of the Ecole Nationale de Magistrature in Ouagadougou and holds a master’s degree in international administration from the Université Paris 1. She began her career in 1994 as a high-ranking official in her country’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, working as head of the unit responsible for relations with international organisations. In 1997, she joined the Burkina Faso’s embassy in Ethiopia, which is also home to the African Union and the Economic Commission for Africa. Back in Burkina Faso in 2003, she became diplomatic advisor to the president, before being appointed as deputy minister for regional cooperation in 2007. In 2011, she was appointed Ambassador of Burkina Faso in Ethiopia, where she also held the position of Permanent Representative to the African Union until her election as AU Commissioner for Political Affairs. Her candidacy was supported by all of the ECOWAS foreign ministers. Ms Samate-Cessouma will notably be in charge of humanitarian affairs, human rights and democracy issues.

Who’s Who?

MINATA SAMATE-CESSOUMA, AU COMMISSIONER FOR POLITICAL AFFAIRS

The Burkinabe Minata Samate-Cessouma was elected as Commissioner for Political Affairs of the African Union at the organisation’s 28th Ordinary Session. Born in 1961 in N’Dorola, in southwestern Burkina Faso, Ms Samate-Cessouma is a graduate of the Ecole Nationale de Magistrature in Ouagadougou and holds a master’s degree in international administration from the Université Paris 1. She began her career in 1994 as a high-ranking official in her country’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, working as head of the unit responsible for relations with international organisations. In 1997, she joined the Burkina Faso’s embassy in Ethiopia, which is also home to the African Union and the Economic Commission for Africa. Back in Burkina Faso in 2003, she became diplomatic advisor to the president, before being appointed as deputy minister for regional cooperation in 2007. In 2011, she was appointed Ambassador of Burkina Faso in Ethiopia, where she also held the position of Permanent Representative to the African Union until her election as AU Commissioner for Political Affairs. Her candidacy was supported by all of the ECOWAS foreign ministers. Ms Samate-Cessouma will notably be in charge of humanitarian affairs, human rights and democracy issues.

Read Ms Samate-Cessouma’s CV: http://burkina-ethiopia.org/index.php/fr/ambassadeur/biographie