

# GLOBAL CENTRE FOR THE RESPONSIBILITY TO PROTECT

12 November 2025

Your Excellency,

On behalf of the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, I am writing in advance of the UN Security Council's open briefing under the agenda item "Peace Consolidation in West Africa," scheduled for 18 November. The Security Council has a responsibility – and an opportunity during this meeting – to ensure that its approach to counterterrorism in the West Africa region, particularly in the Central Sahel, does not exacerbate civilian suffering but rather strengthens protection and contributes to durable peace.

The scale, intensity and complexity of violent extremist threats in the [Central Sahel](#) (Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger), combined with heavy-handed counterterrorism responses by state and non-state actors, have placed populations at grave risk. Armed Islamist groups and government security forces continue to commit serious violations of International Humanitarian Law (IHL), including war crimes and likely crimes against humanity. The military authorities have failed to investigate and prosecute grave human rights abuses.

Amid escalating instability and widespread violence against civilians, these three countries are also experiencing a resurgence of authoritarian rule following a series of military coups. The refusal of the military juntas to implement meaningful transitions to civilian, democratic governance, alongside the growing diplomatic isolation from the Economic Community of West African States and repression against independent voices and institutions, such as human rights defenders and the media, have eroded the rule of law, widened impunity, emboldened perpetrators and left civilians increasingly vulnerable.

Effective counterterrorism measures and the protection of human rights are not conflicting goals, but complementary and mutually reinforcing ones. The broader nexus of prevention frameworks, including the Responsibility to Protect and the [UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy](#), underscores that protecting civilians and preventing atrocities are not optional add-ons, but central to any sustainable security strategy. The UN Secretary-General's [Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism](#) re-emphasized the importance of addressing the root causes of terrorism, pushing counterterrorism efforts "upstream" toward prevention. Terrorism and atrocity crimes are often preceded by threats to marginalized groups, deliberate attacks on civilians, economic and political exclusion, dehumanizing rhetoric and systematic human rights violations. As the Secretary-General has underscored, extremist ideologies and the commission of atrocities are directly connected.

By focusing on prevention and civilian protection, national, regional and international actors can simultaneously address the drivers of terrorism and atrocities. For delegations delivering statements during the open briefing on 18 November, the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect respectfully urges the consideration of the following points:

- **Embed atrocity prevention and human rights protections into counterterrorism efforts.** Encourage the use of the [UN Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes](#) in developing counterterrorism operations and stabilization programs. Embedding risk assessments within security planning helps prevent actions that may unintentionally exacerbate inter-communal tensions or civilian harm. In line with [recommendations](#) from the People's Coalition for the Sahel, all military or security assistance, as well as provisions of arms, trainings and other support, to states or regional organizations should include strengthened safeguards for civilian protection,

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transparency, oversight and accountability mechanisms, as well as training in International Human Rights Law and IHL.

- **Insist on justice, accountability and respect for the rule of law and civic space.** Accountability provides both justice for victims and deterrence against future abuses, contributing to long-term stability. The ongoing crackdown on political opposition, human rights defenders, activists and the media, through arbitrary detentions, enforced disappearances and unlawful forced conscription, severely inhibits independent documentation and monitoring of violations. Delegations should press for the release of all arbitrarily detained individuals and for genuine investigations into all alleged abuses.
- **Promote regional cooperation, early warning and preventive diplomacy.** Prevention must begin well before risk factors escalate. The UN should invest in and support regional, national and local institutions that strengthen societal resilience, reduce vulnerability to identity-based violence and address atrocity risk factors through border management, intelligence sharing and civilian protection partnerships. The Council must maintain regular engagement with the African Union Special Envoy for the Sahel Region and the Special Envoy on the Prevention of Genocide and Mass Atrocities. Collaboration should also include the UN Special Representative for West Africa and the Sahel and their Office, the UN Independent Expert on the situation of human rights in Mali, the UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism, and the European Union Special Envoy on the Sahel.
- **Strengthen collaboration with the Peacebuilding Commission to advance community-based reconciliation and cross-border cooperation** within the framework of the UN Integrated Strategy for the Sahel. Atrocity prevention strategies are most effective when grounded in local expertise and ownership. Increased, predictable support to locally led initiatives, particularly through the Peacebuilding Fund, is essential to breaking cycles of violence and fostering inclusive peace.
- **Apply an intersectional lens to protection and prevention efforts.** Ensure that counterterrorism and stabilization strategies address the compounded vulnerabilities of individuals belonging to more than one marginalized group, particularly women, children and minority populations. Effective atrocity prevention must engage local civil society, women peacebuilders, youth and other marginalized actors to design tailored, context-specific protection and reconciliation measures.

Thank you for your attention to this critical issue. Please accept the assurances of my highest consideration.



Savita Pawnday  
Executive Director