



**The People's Coalition for the Sahel**  
**Presentation of the Four People's Pillars**  
**16 July 2020**

The crisis in the Sahel is worsening. The increasing violence, which is sometimes extreme and perpetrated by various categories of actors, is forcing many people to flee. The closure of thousands of schools has deprived hundreds of thousands of children from their right to education. The COVID-19 pandemic has further exposed the weaknesses of the region's governance and health systems. It has also further revealed the complex causes of violence and insecurity that has led to severe human rights violations, atrocities, and dire humanitarian need across the region.

International collaboration among states is essential to address the complexities of the crisis in the Sahel. We welcome the efforts made by various actors to better protect and respond to the needs of populations and to build an inclusive peace. We take note in this regard of the establishment of the International Coalition for the Sahel. These efforts must be carried out in consultation with the affected populations and in collaboration with local and regional civil society actors, in particular organisations working in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, the three countries affected by the crisis in central Sahel.

Military means have not so far made it possible to ensure the protection of all populations without discrimination and have even led to numerous abuses against civilians. Military means alone do not provide a solution to the conflicts in the central Sahel. States must be able to analyse the situations that lead people to join armed groups. States should look at how conflicts tear communities apart and what needs to be done to address the root causes that create mistrust between people and their governments.

That is why we, Sahelian civil society actors, with the support of African and international civil society partners, announce the launch of a "People's Coalition for the Sahel." Our objective is to help promote the priorities – the "People's Pillars" – that we believe should guide any response to the crisis in our region.

Our coalition is an informal and inclusive collective framework. We aim to engage with political leaders, policymakers, and other critical stakeholders in the Sahel countries, such as military and security forces, as well as governments outside the region that are part of the International Coalition. We aim to elevate the voices and expertise of people and civil society organisations as constructive partners. We do this in the belief this will enable a more effective response to the human security challenges facing people in the Sahel today, to uphold their human rights and address the underlying injustices that fuel the crisis.

## The People's Pillars

The People's Coalition for the Sahel urges states to shape their interventions towards the Sahel around the following "people's pillars." In the coming months, we commit to assessing the impact of the response to the crisis in the Sahel against these pillars, after having established a set of benchmarks for each of the four priorities.

- **People's Pillars #1: Put the protection of civilians and human security at the heart of the response in the Sahel.**

Any intervention – whether military, humanitarian, development, or state-building – must be evaluated on its ability to protect better all people affected by the conflict without discrimination. Any security-based action should distinguish civilians from armed actors. Security actions should aim to prevent and reduce violence, especially gender-based violence and community-based violence, provide better early-warning systems to prevent atrocity crimes and avoid stigmatisation of communities. It should ensure greater respect for international humanitarian and human rights law. Measures to enhance security in the region should be designed in ways to enhance the protection of civilian populations and not make them more insecure. In this line, there should be, a particular focus on the specific needs of people who are most exposed to violence, such as women, children, internally displaced persons, minority groups, as well as specific measures to care for survivors of violence.

- **People's Pillars #2: Create a comprehensive political strategy to address the root causes of insecurity.**

Long-term security, stability and lasting peace in the region will require greater investment in resolving conflicts, building effective accountability systems for all, and tackling inequality and local grievances through political dialogue and agreement. To be effective, the strategy should involve affected populations, community and civil society actors, including human rights organisations, traditional authorities, women leaders, religious leaders and marginalised actors who will help provide a more nuanced understanding of the local context. A strategy should plan for the removal of barriers to peacebuilding and instead promote social cohesion and dialogue with all parties to the conflict. It should recognise the essential role of vulnerable populations such as women and girls, as well as marginalized and voiceless groups, in conflict resolution and peacebuilding. It will also require recognising how the climate crisis in the Sahel drives conflict and proposing solutions to preserve natural resources in the best possible way and ensure equitable and sustainable access to them. A comprehensive long-term strategy, which must have a timeframe of years rather than months, is crucial for creating the conditions for peaceful stability.

- **People's Pillars #3: Respond to humanitarian emergencies and ensuring that aid is responsive to development.**

All parties to the conflict must respect international humanitarian law. Furthermore, they must allow vulnerable populations access to humanitarian assistance, essential services, and all else needed to maintain basic livelihoods. People in the Sahel need a massive increase in humanitarian aid to help them cope with the hardships of conflict and the potential complicating factors linked to the COVID-19 pandemic. An increase in support needs to be part of a comprehensive response plan. Such a plan must ensure a continued flow of humanitarian relief, better transparency on decisions to deliver support, community engagement approaches that integrate the role of local actors such as women's

organisations in the delivery of aid, and clear distinctions between the mandates and responses of humanitarian actors and military and political actors. It must also provide additional financing for development aid and a fair and progressive mobilisation of fiscal resources with a view to strengthening essential services and community engagement approaches, as well as local social safety nets to meet people's basic needs in times of crisis. For example, parents should be able to keep their children, especially girls, in school and not at work. Girls should not be forced into early marriages; women's sexual and reproductive health rights must be protected. People should not have to make choices that violate their fundamental rights, deprive them of their dignity, or put their lives in danger, just to survive.

- **People's Pillars #4: Combat impunity and ensure access to justice for all.**

No attack committed against the civilian population should go unpunished. There must be no tolerance for abuses and atrocities committed by any armed groups, militias, self-defence groups or security forces. All initiatives implemented to address the crisis must be consistent with the rule of law and global human rights norms, considering the vital role of the judiciary and access to justice. Initiatives should prevent harm toward civilians and people suspected of committing abuses, hold perpetrators accountable, and in the event of proven violations, combat impunity to prevent future atrocities. This process must be transparent and continually monitored, including by local civil society organisations, with pre-determined mechanisms for whistleblowing, sanctioning abuses, and ensuring conflict and gender sensitivity. Peacebuilding must necessarily involve a process of reconciliation, through the fight against impunity and access to justice, as well as the establishment of truth and reconciliation processes.

Primary signatory organisations from the Sahel and West Africa:

1. Action Mopti, Mali
2. African Security Sector Network (ASSN)
3. Afrikajom Center (Dakar-based West-African think tank)
4. All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC)
5. Association des Juristes Maliennes (AJM), Mali
6. Association Malienne des Droits de l'Homme (AMDH), Mali
7. Centre Afrika Obota (CAO), Niger
8. Centre Diocésain de Communication (CDC), Ouahigouya, Burkina Faso
9. Centre pour la gouvernance démocratique (CGD), Burkina Faso
10. Collectif contre l'impunité et la stigmatisation des communautés (CISC), Burkina Faso
11. Coordination des associations des femmes de l'Azawad (CAFA), Mali
12. Coordination Nigérienne des ONG et Associations Féminines du Niger (CONGAFEN), Niger
13. Ligue Tchadienne des Droits de l'Homme (LTDH), Tchad
14. Observatoire Kisal
15. Réseau nigérien pour la gestion non violente des conflits (RE-GENOVICO), Niger
16. Réseau Panafricain Pour la Paix, la Démocratie et le Développement (REPPADD), Niger
17. Union fraternelle des croyants (UFC) Dori, Burkina Faso
18. Wathi (Dakar-based West-African think tank)
19. West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) Burkina Faso
20. West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) Mali
21. West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) Niger
22. Women in Law and Development (WiLDAF) Mali

International NGOs supporting the Peoples' Coalition for the Sahel:

1. Action Against Hunger
2. Care International
3. Center for Civilians in Conflict (CIVIC)
4. Fédération internationale pour les droits humains (FIDH)
5. Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect (GCR2P)
6. Médecins du Monde
7. Norwegian Refugee Council
8. Open Society European Policy Institute (OSEPI)
9. Oxfam International
10. Plan International
11. Première Urgence Internationale
12. Saferworld
13. Search for Common Ground
14. Secours Islamique France

*If you are interested to contact any of the signatory or supporting organisations, or if you want to learn more about this statement, please email [SahelCoalitionCitoyenne@gmail.com](mailto:SahelCoalitionCitoyenne@gmail.com)*