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**As military redeployments are being discussed,
a 'civilian surge' is more urgent than ever in the Sahel**

*Statement by the People's Coalition for the Sahel**

16 February 2022 – We, members of the [People's Coalition for the Sahel](#), call on African and European leaders, who are meeting this week for a summit in Brussels, to promote a genuine 'civilian surge' to tackle the root causes of the crisis in the Sahel and better protect civilians.

Rarely has the Sahel been so much in the spotlight. Attention is focused on the possible withdrawal of French and European troops from Mali, the arrival of Russian forces, military coups and diplomatic disputes. But governments and international actors have taken little action to respond to the needs of the population, who continue to be the first victims of insecurity.

In Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, nearly 2,000 civilians have been killed in violence over the past 12 months, two-thirds of which are attributed to so-called jihadist armed groups, according to the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project ([ACLED](#)). [2.5 million](#) people have been forced to flee their homes, the majority of them children who are now out of school – twice as many as a year ago. [15 million](#) Sahelians are dependent on humanitarian aid, food insecurity is spreading at an alarming rate, and access to basic services such as health care is still lacking. Despite the urgency, only [48%](#) of humanitarian needs are currently funded.

Just one year ago, Sahelian heads of state and their international partners made strong commitments at the [G5 Sahel Summit in N'Djamena](#) concerning the protection of civilians, governance, the humanitarian emergency and the fight against impunity, which mirror the four priorities identified by the People's Coalition as key to a more effective response to the crisis in the region (the [People's Pillars](#)). Unfortunately, the promises of a 'civil and political surge' recorded in the final declaration of the summit have been well and truly buried.

In a context of growing polarisation, we strongly condemn the increasing attacks on freedom of expression, from mobile internet blackouts in Burkina Faso to threats against journalists or civil society representatives in Mali, Niger and Chad.

We take note of statements by Sahelian leaders in support of human rights and international humanitarian law. But we deplore the continuation of impunity, which perpetuates mistrust among populations and fuels the cycle of violence. Throughout the central Sahel, [allegations of abuse](#) continue to be made against elements of the defence and security forces, yet the main perpetrators of violations against civilians have not been brought to trial.

The imperatives of transparency and accountability also apply to all foreign forces in the Sahel. We note the rare communication from the French Ministry of Defence on the [death of four civilians](#) during a French military operation on 8 February in northern Burkina Faso. We regret, however, that France has still not responded to the requests of civil society and the President of Niger to open an investigation into the deaths of three civilians on the margins of a demonstration against a French military convoy in Tera, Niger, last November.

One year after the encouraging commitments of the N'Djamena summit, sustained civilian and political investment in the Sahel is more urgent than ever to finally implement a people-centred approach. Continuing to focus on a security response that does not address the root causes of the crisis would repeat the mistakes that have led to the current impasse.

The African Union-European Union Summit on 17-18 February should be an opportunity for a new beginning for the Sahel and its partners. The People's Coalition for the Sahel will continue to monitor responses to the crisis and will publish in the coming weeks a series of updates measuring progress since the publication of the report "[The Sahel: What needs to change](#)".

West African signatory organisations:

1. African Security Sector Network (ASSN)
2. Afrikajom Center
3. Alliance pour la Paix et la Sécurité (APAISE) – Niger
4. Association des Juristes Maliennes (AJM) – Mali
5. Association Malienne des Droits de l'Homme (AMDH) – Mali
6. Association Nigérienne de Défense des Droits de l'Homme (ANDDH) – Niger
7. Association Nodde Nooto (A2N) – Burkina Faso
8. Collectif contre l'Impunité et la Stigmatisation des Communautés (CISC) – Burkina Faso
9. Institut Malien de Recherche-Action pour la Paix (IMRAP) – Mali
10. Ligue Tchadienne des Droits de l'Homme (LTDH) – Tchad
11. Observatoire Citoyen sur la Gouvernance et la Sécurité (OCGS) – Mali
12. Observatoire Kisal
13. Organisation pour de Nouvelles Initiatives en Développement et Santé (ONIDS) – Burkina Faso
14. Mouvement Burkinabé des Droits de l'Homme et des Peuples (MBDHP) – Burkina Faso
15. Réseau de Réflexion Stratégique sur la Sécurité au Sahel (2R3S)
16. Réseau Nigérien pour la gestion non violente des conflits (Re-GENOVICO) – Niger
17. Réseau Panafricain pour la Paix, la Démocratie et le Développement (REPPAD) – Niger
18. SOS-Civisme Niger
19. WATHI Think Thank
20. West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP Niger) – Niger
21. Women in Law and Development (WILDAF) – Mali

International organisations supporting the statement:

22. Civil Society Platform for Peacebuilding and Statebuilding (CSPPS)
23. Cordaid
24. Fédération Internationale pour les Droits Humains (FIDH)
25. Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect (GCR2P)
26. Human Rights Watch (HRW)
27. Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)
28. Oxfam
29. Search for Common Ground
30. SOS Faim Luxembourg

Note to editors

Members of the People's Coalition for the Sahel are available for interviews. To be put in touch with them, please write to: sahelcoalitioncitoyenne@gmail.com

***About the People's Coalition for the Sahel**

The People's Coalition for the Sahel is an informal alliance of [dozens](#) of Sahelian and West African civil society organisations, supported by international NGOs, whose aim is to convince governments to adopt a new approach in the Sahel that better protects civilians.

For more information about the People's Coalition: <https://www.sahelpeoplescoalition.org>