Co-Chairs’ Summary

Denmark, Germany, the European Union, and the United Nations co-chaired a virtual Ministerial Roundtable on the humanitarian crisis in the Central Sahel (Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger) on 20 October 2020 in Copenhagen. During the event, more than 50 announcements were made by representatives from UN Member States, regional organizations, NGOs and civil society organizations, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, UN entities and international financial institutions. The Roundtable built upon a consultation with humanitarian organizations in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, as well as with their regional representations, in Dakar in July 2020, and on the outcome of a Senior Officials Meeting held on 8 September 2020. The latter included the participation of more than five hundred representatives of the Central Sahel governments, donors, civil society partners, international humanitarian organizations, multilateral finance institutions and academia. Fifteen side events aimed at sharing good practice and driving solutions between 12 October and 16 October 2020 preceded the Ministerial Roundtable.

Africa’s Central Sahel is among the world’s fastest growing humanitarian crises. The scale and severity of humanitarian needs in the three countries are unprecedented, with 13.4 million people affected by forced displacement, food insecurity and reduced access to essential basic services. It is leading to a multi-faceted and complex crisis, which has overwhelmed existing local and national capacities and led to a blurring of lines between the humanitarian, development and peace objectives and diminished humanitarian space.

Security threats and obstacles imposed on humanitarian action are increasing, hampering the delivery of assistance. The co-chairs reaffirm their full support to the humanitarian actors that are operating under exceptionally challenging and difficult conditions on the ground and stress the need to sustain humanitarian assistance while also working towards lasting solutions to the challenges that drive the crisis.

The objectives of the Ministerial Roundtable were to mobilise support from partners to address the humanitarian needs and challenges in the three countries of the Central Sahel, gather political momentum and provide strategic guidance on issues of common concern and interest to all participants.

The co-chairs note the following:

- All humanitarian actors remain firmly committed to continue providing vital support to the women, men, girls and boys of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger in accordance with the humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence; contributing to leaving no one behind and accompanying national and local authorities in their primary responsibility to provide basic services to vulnerable populations, including refugees and internally displaced people.

- The co-chairs affirmed the need to address the root drivers of humanitarian needs in the Central Sahel, including conflict and violence, climate change, weak governance, chronic poverty, underdevelopment, and growing demographic pressure in the absence of economic diversification and opportunity and basic social services.
• All actors must commit to respecting and upholding international humanitarian law, refugee law and human rights. Consideration should be given to strengthening reporting mechanisms on alleged violations, as well as accountability for the respect of humanitarian principles.

• Where required in order to access populations in need of assistance in hard-to-reach areas, humanitarian actors should be in a position to negotiate with all parties, including non-state armed groups. It is necessary to increase training and awareness raising on international humanitarian law and on humanitarian access. There is also a need for continuous support to humanitarian air services and humanitarian security management. Civil-military coordination capacities should be strengthened at all levels, in countries and on a regional level, building on international guidelines, improving existing platforms and establishing focal-points.

• Activities should be based on a solid analysis of conflict to ensure the appropriate integration of the “do no harm” principle and conflict sensitive approaches, including by ensuring direct engagement of affected communities themselves when designing and implementing actions on the ground.

• The crisis in Central Sahel is also a protection crisis. The centrality of protection needs to be reflected in humanitarian response plans. This requires a consistent allocation of resources, addressing governance challenges, respecting fundamental rights, including not least of women and girls, and increasing access to basic services, justice, and security, along with economic opportunities through decent jobs and livelihood opportunities. In this respect, strengthening data collection to underpin timely joint analyses, joined-up programming and decision-making is essential.

• Activities should to the greatest extent possible be based upon and planned together with local actors, including affected communities, civil society actors and government authorities at all levels, thereby ensuring sustainability through strengthening of local capacities and ownership.

• Humanitarian and development action must be gender responsive and ensure a sufficient focus on the most vulnerable, in particular women and girls, and recognize their potential to contribute to both social and economic development and conflict resolution.

• The response must consist of a joined-up approach combining humanitarian, development and peace efforts, respecting the objectives and principles applying to each of the three pillars. This requires also multiannual strategies and longer-term efforts, while guaranteeing the necessary degree of flexibility taking into account evolving needs and the security situation. Whenever possible and while ensuring respect of humanitarian principles, governments should be leading the response within the framework of national development strategies and policies.

• The effects of climate change, including as a driver of fragility, food insecurity, conflict, and displacement should be addressed as a priority.

• Scaling up efforts to promote cash transfer and social protection, and making them shock responsive, preferably within or in strong coordination with government social safety systems; and reinforcing preparedness for early action are all modalities to be encouraged.
• Forced displacement should be addressed as a priority, both in humanitarian action and in development cooperation, in close cooperation with relevant government authorities and to the greatest extent possible within the framework of national development strategies as called for in the Global Compact on Refugees.

• Innovative solutions need to be supported to strengthen social cohesion and inclusion among population groups affected by humanitarian crisis, support community based, non-military peace initiatives and promote independent and inclusive dialogue that also supports traditional means of conflict resolution.

• Sustained support and quality funding for the response to humanitarian needs and underlying causes continue to be essential in the following years to alleviate the suffering and protect lives in the Central Sahel. The donor community acknowledged the importance of predictable, multi-year, un-earmarked and flexible funding that drives greater effectiveness, transparency and accountability of support to people affected by conflict and crisis.

• Participants announced a total of USD 996.8 million / EUR 848.9 million for interventions addressing humanitarian needs and challenges for 2020 and USD 725.4 million / EUR 620.8 million for 2021 and beyond. In addition, policy commitments were made, related in particular to: promotion and respect of humanitarian principles, International Humanitarian Law and human rights; protection as a central element of the response; strengthened humanitarian civil-military co-ordination, including as a means to allow access to people in need in conflict affected areas; and joined-up efforts for an effective humanitarian, development and peace nexus, respecting the objectives of each component.

• To maintain positive momentum and attention to the needs of affected people, the co-chairs aim to take stock of progress within a year.