

Mali and the Sahel Sahara in Tunis

On September 9 and 10, 2013, Tunis is hosting a high-level meeting that will bring together officials working on the Mali issue, as well as West African and international specialists in political and security developments in the Sahel-Sahara region. The objectives of the meeting are to conduct a critical examination of the realities underlying the crises in Mali and the Sahel-Sahara and the regional and international responses crafted to date to address them; take stock of the challenges that lie ahead; and identify appropriate responses. The meeting is co-organized by the Centre 4S, the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD) and the International Peace Institute (IPI).

Following a presidential election that was conducted peacefully, in a propitious environment and in the presence of numerous national and foreign observers, Ibrahim Boubakar Keita was elected with an overwhelming majority and his victory recognized by all stakeholders. While Mr. Keita is readying himself to assume office, informed experts and observers, as well as rebels, traffickers and jihadists can ask themselves: and then what?

The organizers of the meeting are of the view that: “The crises in the Sahelian region have been and remain deep. They preceded the collapse of Mali in 2012 and will not end automatically now that legitimacy has been restored through the ballot box”. Moreover, “the challenges for Mali remain huge, while West Africa and the Maghreb are under permanent threat of terrorist attacks, which their countries are not prepared enough to face”.

“The causes and interconnections of problems (armed violence, various trafficking activities, youth unemployment, a crisis of representative democracy and the return of states’ tribalisation) must be explained and addressed, as should the need for the pooling of ECOWAS and Maghreb states’ security assets”.

The organizers further contend that: “the collapse of Mali revealed the limitations of the regional security agreements and confirmed the need to open these arrangements to new partners. Establishing such partnerships must be envisaged with States that lie beyond the Sahel or the continent, that are able to help protect the territorial integrity of the countries under threat”.

How can the gains from the presidential election, the achievements of Operation Serval, the Ouagadougou agreement, and the deployment of MINUSMA be consolidated? The Tunis meeting will provide a forum for an open and frank discussion of the measures that need to be taken with a view to:

- Assisting the new government to manage the structural issues without falling prey to the pressing demands of the urgent;
- Ensuring that all the parties fulfill their commitments under the Ouagadougou agreement and work to build new relationships of trust among Malians, including through the work of the Dialogue and Reconciliation Commission;
- Ensuring the mobilization and effective and responsible disbursements of the Euro 3.4 billion pledged by the “Friends of Mali” at the May 15 conference in Brussels;
- Providing the necessary material and moral assistance to the displaced persons and refugees while organizing their return;
- Preventing that the partial or total withdrawal of French troops of the Operation Serval leave a security vacuum, and ensuring a proper coordination between this withdrawal and the deployment of the MINUSMA, and the restructuring of the Malian security and defense forces.
- Ensuring that the securization and stabilization priorities do not obfuscate the need for a new democratic and accountable governance geared to addressing the basic needs of Mali’s citizens and enlarging their participation in crafting the decisions that affect their lives

“The crises in the Sahel-Sahara region do not start nor end in Mali.” Several regional and international strategies have attempted to address these problems in an integrated manner. The Tunis meeting will take a critical look at these strategies, including the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel.

Several national and international officials are expected in Tunis for an open debate and concrete proposals.

These include: Tiéman Coulibaly, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Mali, Marou Amadou, Minister of Justice of Niger, Albert Koenders, Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Mali, Robert Piper, UN Regional Humanitarian Coordinator for the Sahel, General Makoko, Deputy (Head) of the AU Commission Mission in Mali, Michel Reveyrand de Menthon, European Union Special Envoy for the Sahel, Najim el Hadj Mohamed, Executive Secretary of the Niger National Strategy for Security and Development, Christophe Guilhou, Director of Peace, Security and Human Rights at the International Organization of Francophonie.

Also in attendance to enrich the debates will be various West African and international experts including Mehdi Taj, expert in geopolitics from Tunisia, Abdelkarim Lansari from Niger, Prof. Bouchra Benhida Rahmouni from Morocco, Alain Antil, Sahel Specialist at IFRI and Wolfram Lacher from SWP-Berlin.

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