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Addis Ababa, Ethiopia P.O. Box: 3243 Tel. (251-11) 51 38 22 Fax: (251-11) 51 93 21
Email: situationroom@africa-union.org

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**REPORT OF THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE COMMISSION ON THE MULTINATIONAL JOINT
TASK FORCE AGAINST THE BOKO HARAM TERRORIST GROUP**

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TASK FORCE AGAINST THE BOKO HARAM TERRORIST GROUP**

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The Peace and Security Council (PSC) of the African Union (AU), at its 973rd meeting, held on 18 January 2021, renewed the mandate of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) against the Boko Haram terrorist group for a period of twelve (12) months effective 1 February 2021. The Council also commended the efforts and significant progress made by the MNJTF and the Member countries of Lake Chad Basin Countries (LCBC), namely, Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria, plus Benin, in the fight against the terrorist group, in degrading its operational capability, rescuing abducted civilians and forcing its members to surrender. In addition, the Council emphasized that, despite MNJTF successes, Boko Haram still remains a threat to the countries of the region and, hence, the need to redouble efforts to completely eliminate the terrorist group.

2. The MNJTF has a strength of 10,750 personnel including a Senior Police Advisor to the MNJTF Force Commander and civilian staff of an AU Mission Support Team (MST) coordinating the delivery of the AU additional support to the force as well as advising the Force Commander on Human Rights and Humanitarian coordination issues. The MNJTF continues to carry out operations against the Boko Haram terrorist group in order to stop the threat it poses to the countries and the civilian population in Lake Chad Basin region. The AU has continued to support the MNJTF in line with Communiqué [PSC/PR/2.(CDLXXXIX)] adopted by the 489th meeting of the PSC held on 3 March 2015, in which the Council requested the Commission to take all necessary steps in support of the full operationalization of the MNJTF.

3. This report provides an update on key developments since the PSC meeting held in January 2021, and provides recommendations on the way forward.

II. SECURITY SITUATION IN THE LAKE CHAD BASIN MNJTF AREA OF OPERATION

4. The Boko Haram terrorist group continues to exist in two factions: the Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP) and the Jamaat Ahlis Sunnah Lidda'awati wal-Jihad (JAS). The ISWAP faction pays allegiance to Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), and in turn receives financial aid, technical assistance and other forms of support from them. The presence of Boko Haram has continued to negatively impact on the security situation in the Lake Chad Basin MNJTF Area of Operations (AO) making it fluid and unpredictable. While some areas are relatively stable with the civil populace in place, Boko Haram attacks and displacements take place in other areas. They operate mainly from the Lake Chad Islands (Tumbuns) and carry out attacks on military targets and uncooperative communities, while also depending on some support from the populace. The JAS-Boko Haram faction operates mainly in the Diffa Region of Niger Republic carrying out kidnappings, attacks and other criminal activities.

5. The MNJTF's operations have been successful as they have led to the neutralization of several insurgent fighters, destruction of their camps and logistics bases, recovery/seizure of various quantities of arms and equipment, and liberation of towns and communities. Over the course of 2021, over 160 Boko Haram terrorist fighters were neutralized while

about 130 others were arrested. The Boko Haram terrorist group has been pushed out of all population centres and are contained in their enclaves within the Tumbuns.

6. In addition, MNJTF operations have led to the surrender of numerous insurgent fighters and their families. Most notably, the month of August 2021 witnessed the surrender of about 3,000 repentant Boko Haram insurgents and their family members, to the MNJTF. The death of Abubakar Shekau, the leader of the JAS faction, in May 2021 and infighting between ISWAP and JAS have also been contributory factors to the mass surrender. The surrendered fighters are being received, processed and handed over to the national governments in line with international humanitarian law.

7. The MNJTF operations have created an enabling environment for the return and resettlement of the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) as well as the conduct of humanitarian activities in local communities by government and non-governmental organizations. For example, in March 2021, about 5,000 refugees who had spent 6 years in Minawao Refugee Camp in Cameroon were returned to Banki town in Nigeria. In June 2021, about 6,000 IDPs who fled the Boko Haram violence in 2015 were returned to their hometown of Baroua in Diffa region of Niger Republic. In August 2021, over 6,000 IDPs of Cross Kauwa, Baga and Doron Baga in Kukawa Local Government Area of Borno State, Nigeria were successfully returned to their ancestral homes from IDP Camps in Monguno.

8. Despite the successes and gains achieved so far, the terrorists still maintain strongholds within the Tumbuns on the fringes of Lake Chad. These areas serve as Boko Haram logistic hubs, safe havens and staging grounds from where they launch attacks and ambushes on troops as well as to loot foodstuff and other items from some communities. The year 2021 witnessed more than 134 attacks on military forces including ambushes, direct attack and Improvised Explosives Device (IED) incidents, while about 154 attacks were carried out on civilian targets.

9. IEDs continue to account for a significant portion of the military casualties in terms of both manpower and vehicles. This notwithstanding, the MNJTF remains committed to the full eradication of Boko Haram terrorists in the Lake Chad Basin region and restoring normalcy to the affected areas. Future major operations of the MNJTF will seek to project forces deep into the Tumbuns to drive the terrorists from their strongholds.

III. EUROPEAN UNION –AFRICAN UNION ADDITIONAL SUPPORT TO THE MNJTF

10. It is recalled that the 484th AU PSC meeting called on AU Member States and other members of the international community to extend all necessary support to the efforts of the Member States of the LCBC and Benin, including financial and logistical assistance. As such, since July 2016, the European Union (EU), have continued to provide financial support to the MNJTF, through the AU, that is aligned to the MNJTF stated requirements and within the framework of the Memorandum of Understanding and Support Implementation Agreement signed between the AU, LCBC and MNJTF Troop Contributing Countries (TCCs). It is pertinent to note that EU funding support to MNJTF for the period of January to December 2021 was Euros 18.9 million. The EU has availed more funding support amounting to Euros 20 million to cover the period from January to December 2022.

11. The AU additional support to the MNJTF, funded by the EU, during the course of 2021 includes: the Air Mobility assets (3 helicopters for logistics/personnel movement and casualty evacuation), Level III medical services, Fuel, Command-Control-Communication and Information System (C3IS), Mission Subsistence Allowance (MSA) for the HQ MNJTF Staff Officers, salaries to civilian staff supporting the MNJTF, and MNJTF Headquarters running costs that allow the MNJTF HQ to effectively plan, coordinate and sustain military operations in line with its mandate and the tasks set out in the approved Strategic Concept of Operations.

12. In July 2021, a joint field assessment of the utilisation of this AU additional support was made which among other things recommended for continued support and also identified additional requirements. Following this, a Joint Steering Committee (JSC) meeting was held on 15 September 2021, involving the AU Commission, the LCBC Executive Secretariat, the MNJTF TCCs and the EU. Both the field assessment and the JSC meeting recommended continuation of the AU additional support beyond 2021.

13. The AU additional support to the MNJTF also includes civilian staff comprising of Four (4) Staff of the Strategic Support Cell at the AU Headquarters and Ten (10) Staff of the Mission Support Team embedded within the MNJTF HQ. These civilian staff coordinate the delivery of additional support including the follow-up and accounting for the utilisation of funds and procured services and goods, advising the MNJTF on Human Rights and Humanitarian Coordination issues, and linking the strategic and the operational levels of the MNJTF mission management.

14. As part of facilitating the fulfilment of the mandate of the MNJTF, the Commission has provided support to the MNJTF in ensuring compliance to Regional and International Human Rights and Humanitarian Law standards through the development of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) on handling persons associated with Boko Haram. The Commission is currently supporting the MNJTF in the development of mission specific procedures in the management of recovered Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW). In this vein, from 1 to 2 December 2021 the Commission facilitated a consultative workshop on the development of the MNJTF SOPs for Handling of Recovered SALW in the MNJTF area of operations. This support is part of the strategic responsibility of the AU towards the MNJTF in ensuring the mission complies with International Human Rights and Humanitarian Law as well as other international norms and practices.

IV. AU SUPPORT TO THE REGIONAL STABILISATION STRATEGY THAT CONSOLIDATE THE MNJTF SUCCESSES

15. The progressive improvement of the security situation in the areas affected by the Boko Haram has been a result of the MNJTF operations. As such, the LCBC has continued to implement the Regional Stabilization Strategy (RSS) with the active support of the AU Commission. Tangible outcomes from the implementation of the RSS across the Lake Chad Basin Region have included rehabilitation of facilities for law enforcement forces across affected areas; construction of essential infrastructure and basic services, and provision of opportunity-enhancing schemes for affected communities.

16. Overall, the Commission's institutional support to the LCBC as per the PSC Communique, PSC/PR/COMM. (DCCCXVI) has produced balanced and progressive outcomes

at all levels of stabilization. To sustain this, the Commission needs to maintain its interest in stabilizing the Lake Chad Basin Region, ensuring that efforts are not spared to support the activities that complement the invaluable gains made by the MNJTF.

V. CHALLENGES

17. The AU and the MNJTF noted that the MNJTF faces the following major challenges:
 - a. Lack of counter Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs).
 - b. Lack of a dedicated Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) service.

VI. OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

18. The MNJTF has continued to conduct its operations against the Boko Haram terrorist group, due to the collective commitment and efforts of the Troop Contributing Countries, as well as the support of the AU and the international community, most notably the EU.

19. The fighting capacity of the Boko Haram has been severely degraded, thereby creating opportunities for the return of refugees and Internally Displaced People (IDPs) and implementation of stabilisation, recovery and resilience activities in the Boko Haram affected communities.

20. The continued support of the PSC leadership, the AUC and AU partners, particularly the EU, has played a critical role in the effectiveness of the MNJTF operations by contributing to the successful implementation of its mandate. This has led to the degradation and/or elimination of Boko Haram terrorist group and its activities.

21. In light of the situation on the ground, it is recommended that:
 - a. The AU and the international community should continue to support the MNJTF in its operations against the Boko Haram terrorist group by addressing the challenges facing the Joint Task Force thereby enhancing its operational effectiveness.;
 - b. Efforts should be scaled to ensure that the gains made to date and the current momentum in the fight against Boko Haram terrorist group and violent extremism in the Lake Chad Basin region are consolidated;
 - c. The AU should support the LCBC to deepen partnerships with ECOWAS and ECCAS as well as other relevant regional institutions, including the newly formed African Union Development Agency (AUDA);
 - d. The PSC should consider the renewal of the mandate of MNJTF for 12 months effective 01 February 2022;
 - e. The PSC should remain seized with this matter