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TO THE

UNITED STATES SENATE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

ON

INSTABILITY IN AFRICA

Current threats in Nigeria, the Great Lake Region, Mali, Somalia and East Africa; and international development responses.

Washington DC, 10 May, 2016

Mr. Chairman, Mr Ranking Member, Members of the Committee,

I am honored, as Regional Director for Africa at the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), to be invited as a panelist before the US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations.

UNDP is the lead UN development agency. We are active in 168 countries and territories across the world, including all 53 countries in Africa. Our mission, as set by Member States through our Executive Board, is to assist countries to eradicate poverty and, at the same time, achieve a significant reduction of inequalities and exclusion. We do this by supporting inclusive growth and development, fostering democratic governance and building resilient institutions and communities that are better able to manage risks that can endanger peace and development.

Mr. Chairman,

My purpose today is two-fold.

First, I want to briefly update you on what we, as UNDP, have learnt about instability in Africa. Second, I will share our view on the possible developmental approaches to mitigate the threats to peace and stability in what is often referred to as *"Africa's Arc of Instability"* which encompasses the Sahel, the Lake Chad Region and the Horn of Africa.

But let me first recognize and celebrate that Africa has made significant strides on the social, political and economic front since the turn of the century.

Figures show that Africa's rate of extreme poverty fell from 56% in 1990 to 43% in 2012; steady economic growth and macroeconomic stability have resurged; and protracted armed conflicts are on a downward trend. We have seen that these **successes tend to be driven by countries that invest in the safety, security and productive lives of their citizens**. We have also seen, in many instances, genuine and inclusive democratic transitions leading to more responsive and accountable governments. This progress, however, is at risk of reversal.

Mr. Chair, Ranking Member, Members of the Committee,

The stark reality is that steady economic growth and macroeconomic stability have not transformed into sustainable development. Deep socio-economic inequalities within and between communities in these sub-regions and indeed across much of Africa persist. While extreme

poverty has been reduced, a vast number of citizens continue to live in dire conditions with little prospect of attaining the most basic of human development needs in health, education or livelihoods. It is estimated that 60% of the population in the region are between the ages 18 – 30. It is young Africans who are making the grim choice as illegal migrants - travelling to the North of Africa destined for the West, setting off on journeys that we know frequently end in death. It is these youth, particularly females, who are kidnapped, trafficked into servitude, and exploited. They are young; they are poor; and the majority are desperate. It is young people, in particular, who are easy prey for extremist ideologues. They are radicalized, with promises of relevance and prosperity and encouraged along a path of violence and destruction. In Nigeria, more than 40% of suicide bombers are female. One in five suicide bombers deployed by Boko Haram last year was a child and, usually, a girl.

The exponential growth of violent extremism in Africa, including the growing convergence between different groups, also presents an imminent threat to Africa's steady path to prosperity. We estimate that at least 33,000 persons have been killed in Africa since 2011, and 6 million people are internally displaced as a result of violent extremism.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, Members of the Committee,

Societies and communities bear the brunt of extremist violence. Extremists target public spaces such as markets and bus stations, forcing people to make a difficult choice between risking death by going to work to earn a living, or risking the very survival of their families. Nowhere is this more evident than in the Lake Chad Basin – Nigeria, Chad, Niger and Cameroon – where over 3

million people are displaced, thousands have been killed and many more are held captive across the four countries. The killing of students in Garissa, Kenya, the kidnapping of the Chibok girls in Dikwa, Nigeria, the suicide attack on medical students in Somalia, and the recent tragic events in Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire and Mali have shown that this phenomenon is unique in targeting the innocent and vulnerable, breeding discord among communities, and arresting development.

The impact of extremist violence is not only the loss of lives and destruction of property – national economies are also negatively affected. According to the International Monetary Fund, violent extremism is amongst the major risks to economies in parts of Africa. Tunisia's GDP growth has been cut from 3% to 1% with a 45% decline in tourism. Chad's GDP's contracted by 1% in 2015 from a 5% growth in 2014, and Kenya saw a 25% reduction in tourism following terrorist attacks.

Weak governance and limited opportunities for youth are critical drivers of socio-political instability. They fuel illegal migration and violent extremism, significantly intensifying the risk that Africa may once again be described as a "blight on the conscience of the world".

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, Members of the Committee,

Over the last two years, UNDP has held a number of consultations, conducted a series of studies and commissioned research to better understand the violent extremism scourge in Africa. We have just concluded a seminal *"perception study"* on *"radicalization, violence and insecurity in the Sahel"*, covering border communities in eight countries – Mauritania, Senegal, Niger, Mali,

Chad, Burkina Faso, Cameroon and Nigeria. That study is the first, we believe, to assess perceptions of affected populations on what they see as the main factors explaining radicalization, and what they would expect as solutions. We are also currently conducting research on *"radicalization journey mapping"* with a view to identifying *"the tipping point to violent extremism"*. This research, which interviews extremists , their families and their communities, covers the zones of operation of Boko Haram and Al Shabaab in regions of Nigeria, Kenya, Uganda and Somalia; and it will be extended (in a phase II) to Northern Mali and the Lake Chad region.

Preliminary results of these various studies and research converge in three major findings:

1. While the drivers of radicalization are multi-faceted, and defy easy analysis, their major roots are to be found in: *(i) poverty and low human development (ii)* an *endemic sense of economic and political exclusion and marginalization; and (iii) weak social contracts with high level of societal divisions along ethnic or religious lines.*

2. *The most fertile grounds for radicalization are border areas, which are, in most of the countries studied, neglected in terms of socio-economic and institutional infrastructure.*

3. *While there are a number of common elements which drive radicalization, there are also some important differences between countries. For example, socio-economic factors tend to be the prominent drivers in the Sahel, the Lake Chad Basin, Somalia and Nigeria; whereas political grievances are a much more prominent factor in Kenya.*

In short, violent extremism finds fertile ground among the disenfranchised and in ungoverned spaces.

It is with this research and analysis in mind that we have embarked on a development-led approach which seeks to address the multiple drivers and enablers of radicalization and violent extremism.

We have launched a four-year regional initiative on *"preventing and responding to violent extremism in Africa"* which focuses on supporting regional institutions, governments, communities and at-risk individuals to address the drivers and related factors.

We are working in epicenter countries, spill-over countries and at-risk countries to help partners develop and implement integrated, regional and national policies and strategies; effective decentralization; cross-border development initiatives; rule of law; peer-to-peer, community and faith-based interventions to prevent youth radicalization and de-escalate local conflicts. We also promote social cohesion at community level, working with local and national governments to provide basic social services to citizens. We support employment creation, and we work with local governments to strengthen public administration and the extension of state authority.

We have learned that well-resourced, comprehensive and integrated programs combining security and development responses offer the best approaches to combating violent extremism. We have further learned that communities – including faith groups – should be at the center of the response, with efforts to increase trust and build confidence between them and law

enforcement agencies. These initiatives, combined with participatory governance and sustained efforts to address inequality, can bring hope, opportunity and purpose to young people and excluded communities. This approach is critical in successfully inoculating communities against radicalization.

Let me conclude my remarks by emphasizing that for Africa to meet its full development potential, preventing and responding to violent extremism is essential. This will require coordinated and collaborative partnerships between governments, development partners and civil society groups.

Mr. Chairman, I thank this Committee for holding these hearings, which can only rightly add to the sense of urgency that this situation warrants, and for inviting UNDP to make a submission.