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Senate Committee on Foreign Relations**

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“Addressing Developments in Mali: Restoring Democracy and Reclaiming the North.”

Thank you very much Chairman Coons and Members of the Committee for the opportunity to testify before you on this most important subject. Mali’s March 21, 2012, military coup d’état ended two decades of Malian democracy, resulted in the loss of the northern Mali to extremist groups, and further destabilized an already fragile Sahel region. Mali is now facing four distinct but overlapping challenges – the restoration of democratic governance, political negotiations with northern groups that reject extremism, al Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb’s expanded presence in northern Mali, and an ongoing humanitarian crisis. Mali, regional partners, and the international community must respond to each of these challenges simultaneously. Our response to any one of these challenges must not be dependent on the achievement of another.

1. Restoring a Democratically-Elected Government

Mali’s first challenge is the restoration of democratic governance. The framework agreement negotiated by ECOWAS with the military junta following the March 21 coup mandates that Mali’s interim government must organize elections and put in place a legitimate, democratically-elected government by April 2013.

While the interim government has made progress in strengthening governance, preparations for elections are moving slowly. The longer Mali's political elite delay in putting this electoral process in motion, the more likely it is that the April 2013 date will slip. We continue to encourage the interim government to set a date for elections and develop a roadmap for the transition to a democratically-elected government. I recently sent a letter to interim Malian Prime Minister Diarra urging him to support preparations for elections and repeating our assurance that the United States, along with the international community, stands ready to assist him in overcoming the challenges for carrying out free, fair and transparent elections. My letter also emphasized our support for recent ECOWAS statements regarding the ineligibility of current members of the interim government to run in the elections.

The United States has made elections in Mali a priority because historically transitional governments that are not pressed to hold elections and restore constitutional order tend to hold on to power long beyond their mandate. While we support interim President Traore and interim Prime Minister Diarra as they guide the transition government during this challenging time in Mali's history, transition governments, including this one, are inherently weak. Mali needs now more than ever a strong democratic government to restore its democratic tradition and provide the strong leadership necessary to negotiate a political agreement with northern rebels, reform its security sector, and lead a military intervention in the north to restore and maintain Mali's territorial integrity. Although there is currently some Malian public resistance to holding elections before the reunification of the country, we will continue to express the need to hold elections prior to recapturing the north. We encourage the interim government to consult with UNHCR and other stakeholders to find ways to hold polls in refugee camps so those displaced by the violence in northern Mali are given an opportunity to vote and ensure the

participation of the population of northern Mali. Elections can send a strong message to coup leaders, extremists, and rebels alike – the Malian people will not allow violence to rob them of their democracy.

The interim government should build on the preparations that were undertaken before the aborted April 2012 elections and hold elections as soon as technically feasible with as many voters as possible. The United States looks forward to working with the interim government and the international community to examine the best mechanism to ensure that voters from all regions of Mali, including those in refugee camps in neighboring countries, can participate in national elections.

The 2013 elections must be transparent and free of intimidation from the coup leaders and their supporters. We have been unequivocal in our messages to coup leader Captain Sanogo and the Malian public about the need for Sanogo to leave the political stage and be held accountable for the excesses of this period, and in particular the human rights abuses and mistreatments credibly ascribed to Captain Sanogo and his associates. We have imposed targeted travel sanctions on more than 60 individuals who were involved in the coup, supported its authors, or who continue to impede the restoration of democracy. We will maintain these kinds of pressures until Mali transitions to a democratically-elected government.

As a result of the March 2012 coup in Mali, the U.S. Government formally terminated assistance to the Government of Mali. Funding for programs that provide life-saving, critical assistance in health and food security, as well as democratic elections support programming, is reviewed on a case-by-case basis. These decisions will be affected by the current political and security situation in Mali and how it develops, with recognition that these are complex challenges. Programs that have resumed include activities to reduce child mortality, HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment, essential life-saving services for maternal and child

health, and preparation for the planting season to ensure food security. These activities are implemented through non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

The United States firmly believes that Mali's interim leaders must continue preparations in earnest to hold elections simultaneous with efforts to address the political grievances of Mali's northern populations, restore Mali's territorial integrity, and respond to the continued humanitarian crisis. Elections are critical for ensuring that the Malian government has the legitimacy needed to negotiate with indigenous northern groups and effectively coordinate with regional and international partners to oust AQIM.

2. Rebellion in the North and Negotiations

The ongoing rebellion in northern Mali is another major factor contributing to the instability and crises in Mali and the Sahel. Recognizing that the Tuareg and other non-extremist groups in northern Mali have legitimate political and socioeconomic grievances, ECOWAS, the AU, and the international community have encouraged a renewed and strengthened process of mediation to end the northern rebellion. The United States commends the efforts of African leaders, including President Compaoré of Burkina Faso, to facilitate dialogue between the interim government and northern groups that accept Mali's territorial integrity and reject terrorism.

We support the commitment of interim President Traore to open dialogue with those actors in the north who are committed to Mali's territorial integrity and secular nature. We also welcomed the news that representatives of the Tuareg National Movement for the Liberation of the Azawad (MNLA) have retracted their declaration of independence of the north, and key figures in the MNLA and Ansar

al Dine have declared their readiness to negotiate with the interim government. Mali's interim government must demonstrate its commitment to negotiations by appointing a lead negotiator for the north to peacefully address the long-standing political grievances of northern groups that accept Mali's territorial integrity and renounce terrorism. The feasibility of a lasting negotiated settlement, however, will ultimately depend on the legitimacy that can only come with a democratically-elected government. Long-term talks will be needed to address the legitimate social and economic needs of northern populations; these future negotiations are a necessary complement to the current short-term negotiations to separate those groups in the north who respect Mali's territorial integrity and secular nature from the extremists and terrorist groups with whom negotiation is not an option.

The participation of Algeria and Mauritania, which are not members of ECOWAS, also will be crucial to a lasting solution in northern Mali. This week, a delegation of U.S. officials, including Deputy Secretary of State Burns, will be traveling to Algiers to encourage the Algerians to play a more active role in addressing the crises in northern Mali, as Secretary Clinton did during her recent visit to Algeria.

3. Threats from terrorists and other extremist elements

We are seriously concerned about the presence and activities of terrorist and extremist groups in northern Mali. Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO), and affiliated groups have exploited the political chaos created by the coup and northern rebellion to expand their safe haven in northern Mali and impose their radical ideology on local populations. While their tactics and ideology remain alien to the vast majority of the population in the affected areas, AQIM and MUJAO established at least temporary

relationships with a number of groups in the area and currently hold the military upper hand in the areas under their control, including the key towns of Timbuktu, Gao and Kidal.

Any attempt to militarily oust AQIM from northern Mali must be African-led, well-planned, and well-resourced. Military plans must also account for civilian security and humanitarian response. We support the efforts of the interim government of Mali, ECOWAS, the African Union, the United Nations, neighboring partners, and others in the international community to prepare a military response, in accordance with international law, to address the threat of terrorists and extremists in northern Mali. The threat of military force has contributed to change in some of the actors, witnessed by the recent willingness of the MNLA and some members of Ansar al Dine to negotiate with the interim government.

The military concept proposed by ECOWAS and endorsed by the AU provides a foundation for planning a proposed military intervention in northern Mali. The military concept proposes an Africa-led effort, but several key questions must be answered to ensure that this effort is also well-planned and well-resourced. These issues include outstanding questions about necessary force levels, the capabilities of the Malian and international forces to accomplish the objectives of the mission, cost and funding needs, logistical requirements, operational timelines, planning for minimizing impacts on civilian security and the humanitarian situation, and ensuring that the proposed military action is adequately linked to a sufficiently detailed political strategy and end-state for military operations in the north.

We have sent military planners to ECOWAS to assist with the continued development and refinement of the plan for international intervention. As the planning continues, we expect that many of the outstanding questions will be

answered. We also continue to engage with the UN and our international partners in preparation for an anticipated UN Security Council resolution on a military intervention in the north.

As plans develop for the military operation we will be better able to determine how the United States can best support the ECOWAS and AU elements of the military force.

Mali's neighbors have intensified their ongoing efforts to bolster their own security and address the AQIM safe haven in northern Mali. Algeria, Mauritania and Niger are concerned that any military intervention in northern Mali will cause a spillover of extremists across their borders. This could also have repercussions on the security of refugees. These neighbors are increasing their border security, and we are urging UNHCR to work with host governments to ensure appropriate security and screening measures are in place in order to maintain the impartiality, neutrality, and civilian nature of refugee camps. These governments strongly favor exhausting political dialogue before an intervention.

We are monitoring the actions of AQIM and other extremist and terrorist organizations in the north, and continue to work with the international community to address this evolving threat. We continue to enhance our work with Mali's neighbors, to increase their capacity to secure their borders, disrupt AQIM supply lines, and contain the spread of extremist groups. We assist Mauritania and Niger through the Trans-Sahara Counter Terrorism Partnership (TSCTP), which is designed to help build long-term capacity to contain and marginalize terrorist organizations and facilitation networks; disrupt efforts to recruit, train, and provision terrorists and extremists; counter efforts to establish safe havens for terrorist organizations; and disrupt foreign fighter networks that may attempt to operate outside the region. Lasting resolution to the terrorist threat will require

that the countries in the Sahel develop the capacity to counter this threat, along with other transnational threats like drug smuggling and human trafficking.

4. Humanitarian crisis

The human toll of these overlapping challenges has been enormous. Since the start of the fighting in northern Mali, more than 410,000 people have become refugees or internally displaced. Of these, nearly 200,000 people are displaced within Mali, and more than 210,000 Malian refugees have fled to Niger, Mauritania, and Burkina Faso. Algeria also hosts Malian refugees.

In an effort to mitigate the effects of the complex humanitarian crisis in the Sahel, we are providing humanitarian and food assistance to those displaced by the conflict in northern Mali and those affected by the region's food crisis. For 2012 to date, the U.S. government provided more than \$445 million in assistance to the Sahel region, \$119 million of which was in support of emergency needs within Mali and among refugee populations outside of Mali. We support the work of the United Nations Regional Humanitarian Coordinator for the Sahel and his efforts to ensure access to affected populations and coordinate the humanitarian response, including contingency planning for possible new displacements as a result of a military intervention. We hold that the humanitarian response should remain civilian-led in order to ensure the neutral and impartial character of humanitarian operations.

5. Response from Partners in the International Community

We have encouraged greater international cooperation and coordination in developing a comprehensive approach to Mali's multiple crises and the greater

Sahel. The UN Secretary General's recent appointment of a Special Envoy for the Sahel will help provide the needed facilitation and coordination. We will discuss the drafting of the Secretary General's integrated strategy for the Sahel, at a meeting in Rome meeting on December 7. We will also discuss coordination at a UNSC Ministerial-level discussion on the situation in the Sahel to be convened by the Kingdom of Morocco on December 10 during its Presidency of the Security Council. UNSC Resolution 2071 provided a useful framework for addressing Mali's four overlapping challenges. It is important that the next UNSC Resolution, which will be based in part on the UN Secretary General's report to the Security Council on Mali, ensures that the restoration of democracy, political negotiations with northern populations, and the humanitarian response receive the same level of priority as military preparations to oust AQIM.

ECOWAS clearly has a very important role to play in coordination. Mali was a founding member of ECOWAS and five of the organization's 15 member states share borders with Mali. But we have to recognize that Algeria and Mauritania also border Mali, but are not members of ECOWAS. We have encouraged ECOWAS, the AU and our international partners to structure their engagements on Mali in a way that will incorporate Mali's neighbors, including Algeria and Mauritania.

We are continuing to work with our international partners to develop a specific plan for any military intervention in northern Mali that includes details on cost- and burden-sharing for the intervention. We look forward to consulting with Congress further to ensure the support necessary to make our policy in Mali successful.

In closing, addressing these four overlapping challenges will require comprehensive, sustained and dedicated regional and international support. The United States continues to encourage Mali to prepare for elections to restore

democratic governance. We are committed to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Mali. We support inclusive dialogue and negotiation to address the economic and social needs of marginalized groups in the north. We support reunification of Malian territory, both through negotiations with those Malians who support a unified and secular state and through well-financed, -resourced, and – managed military action to dislodge terrorists. And we continue to address the humanitarian crisis in the Sahel region with assistance. Thank you.