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**REPORT OF THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE COMMISSION
ON TERRORISM AND VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN AFRICA**

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. At the 303rd meeting of Council, held on 8 December 2011, the Commission submitted a Report on Terrorism in Africa and the AU's efforts to address this scourge [PSC/PR (CCCIII)]. On its part, Council, following its deliberations, adopted communiqué PSC/PR/COMM.2(CCCIII) in which it set out a number of steps to be taken as part of the AU's counter-terrorism efforts.

2. This report is submitted in pursuance to the decision of the 249th meeting of Council, held on 22 November 2010, requesting the Commission to submit reports and provide briefings, as appropriate, on the state of terrorism in Africa and the efforts made at both the continental and international levels to address this scourge [PSC/PR/COMM.(CCXLIX)]. It provides an overview of key developments in this respect during the period under review. The report concludes with observations on the way forward.

**II. OVERVIEW OF INCIDENTS AND DEVELOPMENTS RELATING TO TERRORISM
AND VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN AFRICA**

3. The paragraphs below provide an overview of key developments relating to terrorism in various regions of the continent, namely East Africa, Central Africa, West Africa and the Sahelo-Saharan region, and North Africa.

(a) East Africa

4. East Africa continues to be seriously affected by terrorism, largely as a result of the activities of *Harakat Al-Shabaab al Mujahedeen* - AS (Mujahideen Youth Movement), which is active in Somalia and beyond. AS continues to host a significant number of foreign fighters estimated to be between 1,000 and 1,500. The foreign fighters in Somalia are not a monolithic group. Some are members of Al Qaeda and have been in Somalia since the early 1990s, others are global jihadists who roam the world in search of terrorist opportunities, while a significant number are young unemployed Africans, mainly from the East African region, who are in Somalia because they have been inspired by AS or are using Somalia as a training ground. The presence of foreign fighters further supports available intelligence on the existence of links between AS and other terrorism groups, including Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Nigeria's Boko Haram and, possibly, *Harakat al Tawhid wa al Jihad fi Gharb Ifriqiya* - the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO), even though the extent and nature of these links are yet to be ascertained.

5. In **Somalia**, the Somali forces and those of the AU Mission in the country (AMISOM) have made significant inroads in their fight against AS since taking control of Mogadishu, in

August 2011. However, AS still retains the ability to strike, especially through Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs), targeted assassination and suicide attacks. This is demonstrated by the recent attempt on the life of the newly-elected President, on 12 September 2012, the assassination of journalists, the suicide attack on a restaurant in Mogadishu, on 4 November 2012, and the bomb blast near the Federal Parliament buildings, on 7 November 2012. Al Shabaab has relocated much of its manpower and equipment to areas such as Hiraan, Galgaduud and Golis Mountain (Puntland), where the Somali forces and allied militias have a limited presence. It should also be noted that the group's media platform remains an effective tool for the recruitment of fighters and the mobilization of funding for its activities.

6. Journalists continue to be targeted by the group. Since the beginning of 2012, 17 journalists have been killed in separate attacks. Furthermore, the group continues to restrict the number and activities of humanitarian organizations and to commit human rights abuses in areas under its control. It is increasingly conscripting children to fill in its ranks. Schools are being prohibited from teaching sciences and other subjects that the group deems improper, while teachers face threats, including death if they refuse to comply.

7. AS exploits inter-communal tensions to mobilize support. The group identifies minority and marginalized clans to which it provides protection in exchange for combatants and logistical support. It has been found that certain minority clans are more represented in the rank and file of the group than larger ones.

8. Recent developments have shown that AS is facing internal disputes on a number of issues. One of these issues is the declared merger with Al Qaeda earlier this year. This is believed to be opposed by other senior leaders within AS, who consider that such merger prevents the group from prioritizing "local jihad" and reduce its already dwindling local support. Other issues around which dispute revolves include AS territorial strategy and the influence of foreign fighters.

9. In **Kenya**, attacks by AS-linked elements and sympathizers were also recorded during the reporting period, affecting mostly Nairobi, Garissa and Mombasa. Since October 2011, several people have been killed and dozens more wounded in separate attacks across the country. The majority of the attacks are believed to have been carried out by youths who returned home after spending some time training in Somalia. Following AMISOM's offensive against the Somalia port cities of Merka and Kismayo, many young East Africans who had gone to Somalia to fight alongside Al Shabaab are reported to have returned to their countries of origin as sleeper cells.

(b) Central Africa

10. In Central Africa, terrorism remains largely dominated by the activities of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). The LRA continues to spread terror against civilians by ambushing traders and travelers, raiding and looting villages, killing civilians, as well as abducting women

and children for exploitation as sexual slaves, porters and fighters. The most LRA-affected area is the tri-border zone between the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), the Central African Republic (CAR) and South Sudan, where elements of the LRA operate in small, highly mobile groups, in large swathes of territory, exploiting their isolation and limited State presence. Between January and October 2012, the LRA carried out 137 lootings and abducted 411 persons. Overall, the LRA atrocities have to date displaced about 470,000 persons in the DRC, CAR and South Sudan. A majority of them are in the DRC.

(c) West Africa and the Saheho-Saharan region

11. In **Nigeria**, *Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad* (People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad), also known as Boko Haram, continues to carry out terrorist attacks. It is estimated that the group has killed hundreds of people and wounded many others. In March 2012, Boko Haram executed a British and an Italian citizens it had abducted in May 2011. Boko Haram has demonstrated increased sophistication and lethality. The group is also involved in bank robberies, as it seeks financial resources for its activities. The Nigerian Government has continued to make sustained efforts to bring to an end the terrorist and criminal activities of Boko Haram, notably through the Joint Task Force, consisting of various arms from the defence and security apparatus.

12. In **Mali**, AQIM and a number of other terrorist and criminal groups have now entrenched themselves in the north of the country. The situation was worsened, in the aftermath of the Libyan crisis, by the return of an estimated 2,000 armed combatants and the proliferation of unquantifiable arms and ammunitions from the Libyan military depots. The group is deeply involved in human, drug and arms trafficking, as well as in abductions. Mention should also be made of MUJAO, an offshoot of AQIM. The group became known after claiming responsibility for the kidnapping of three European aid workers in the Saharawi refugee camps, in Tindouf, in October 2011. MUJAO is also responsible for the kidnapping, on 4 April 2012, of seven Algerian diplomats in Gao, northern Mali, three of whom were released on 5 July 2012.

13. Tourism, which constitutes an important sector of the Malian economy, has been badly affected by the presence of AQIM in the region. Mali is also known for its rich Islamic heritage and religious tolerance. However, since taking control of the north in the recent months, Ansar Dine, AQIM and MUJAO have imposed obscurantist interpretation of Islam. Harsh punishments have been carried out against people accused of not respecting the Islamic law and personal liberties severely curtailed. Furthermore, some of the groups active on the ground have been involved in the desecration, damage and destruction of sites of holy, historic and cultural significance, some of which are listed as UNESCO World Heritage Sites, including in the city of Timbuktu.

14. Countries of the region, including Algeria, Mauritania and Niger, who share long borders with Mali, continue to be affected by the situation in Mali and the overall situation in the region, in particular as terrorist groups use their sanctuaries to try to launch attacks against

neighboring countries. In March 2012, MUJAO claimed responsibility for the car bomb attacks at military bases south of the cities of Tamanrasset and Ouargla.

(d) North Africa

15. In **Libya**, the Brigade for the Release of the Imprisoned Sheikh Omar Abdulrahman claimed responsibility for an attack against the office of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in the city of Benghazi, in May 2012, and a subsequent attack, in June 2012, against the US Consulate. The group claims that the latter attack was in retaliation for the killing, by a US drone strike in Pakistan, of Mohamed Hassan Qaid, also known as Abu Yahya al Libi, believed to be a senior commander in Al-Qaeda. On 11 September 2012, an attack was carried out against the US Consulate in Benghazi during which the US Ambassador to Libya was killed along with 3 other US diplomats. The Ansar al-Sharia brigade and other militias are blamed for the attack.

16. In **Egypt**, the Sinai region witnessed an attack, on 5 August 2012, by members of the *Tawheed and Jihad* group (Unicity and Jihad group) on a checkpoint near the town of Sheikh Zuweid. A number of soldiers were killed during the attack.

III. OUTREACH, ADVOCACY AND COORDINATION EFFORTS BY THE AU

17. During the period under review, the Commission has been actively involved in efforts to sensitize Member States on the continental and global normative and operational counter-terrorism framework and on the need for its effective implementation. It is in this context that the Commission attended or organized a number of meetings and other similar events over the past months.

(a) Activities towards Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and other regional bodies

18. In order to further enhance cooperation and coordination with the RECs, on 6 March 2012, the Commission met with the Joint IGAD Security Sector Program (ISSP) and the Centre for Global Counter-Terrorism Cooperation (CGCC) Task Force on Legal Cooperation Against Terrorism. The meeting was held within the context of the Task Force tour to consult with stakeholders across the region on the best ways and means of strengthening cross-border legal cooperation against transnational terrorism.

19. On its part, the African Centre on the Study and Research on Terrorism (ACSRT) undertook a working visit to the Southern African Development Community (SADC) to discuss areas of cooperation and a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in this regard. The ACSRT is also in the process of concluding an MoU with the Committee of Intelligence and Security Services of Africa (CISSA) and the Nigeria Defense College. In particular, collaboration between the ACSRT and CISSA will enhance the effectiveness of counter-terrorism efforts.

(b) First Annual Convention of Counter-Terrorism Practitioners in the Horn and Eastern Africa

20. From 22 to 23 May 2012, in Addis Ababa, the Special Representative for Counter-Terrorism Cooperation and Director of the ACSRT, Francisco Madeira, participated in the First Annual Convention of Counterterrorism Practitioners in the Horn and Eastern Africa. The Convention provided an opportunity for counter-terrorism practitioners to consider evolving threats and challenges in the region, develop joint responses, and build a stronger professional network in the Horn and Eastern Africa.

(c) Third Conference of African Ministers in Charge of Border Issues

21. The issue of border security in the context of the fight against terrorism featured prominently during the deliberations of the 3rd Conference of African Ministers in Charge of Border Issues, convened by the Commission in Niamey, Niger, on 17 May 2012. The Conference noted with concern the emergence of new security challenges, as illustrated by the crisis in the Sahel region, which highlight the need for States to ensure effective control of their territories and to enhance inter-African cooperation in the field of border security. The Conference further stressed the importance of sharing information and intelligence, as well as the role of the ACSRT, in this respect. The Declaration adopted by the Conference was endorsed by the 21st Ordinary Session of the Executive Council, held in Addis Ababa, from 9 to 13 July 2012 [Dec. EX.CL/Dec.703(XXI)].

(d) Ministerial meeting of core countries

22. On 6 August 2012, the ACSRT participated in the ministerial level meeting of the core countries. The meeting was covered as part of the regular consultations to organize and structure regional cooperation for security and development and within the context of the situation prevailing in Mali. The ACSRT and the structures created by the core countries, namely the Fusion and Liaison Unit (UFL) and the Joint Operational Chiefs of Staff Committee (CEMOC) briefed the meeting on the prevailing situation on the ground.

IV. CAPACITY BUILDING AND OPERATIONAL SUPPORT TO MEMBER STATES

23. Pursuant to its Strategic Plan of Activity for the period 2010-2013, the ACSRT organized, in collaboration with Member States, RECs and partners, a number of workshops, seminars and training during the period under review. In carrying out these activities, the ACSRT placed particular emphasis on the need to build local expertise and facilitate the sharing of resources and experiences among Member States and RECs.

(a) Seminar on counter-radicalization, counter-violent extremism and de-radicalization

24. From 8 to 10 April 2012, in Algiers, the ACRST organized a seminar to examine and evaluate national experiences, establish broad guidelines of an analysis or diagnosis grid for radical discourse and design a common methodology for African States for developing and implementing counter-radicalization and de-radicalization programs, as well as effective legal and administrative measures. The seminar, which was organized in collaboration with the UFL, was attended by 40 Government officials, members of religious organization and representatives of civil society from 8 member states.

(b) Intelligence Analysis

25. From 17 to 26 April 2012, in Algiers, the ACSRT, in collaboration with the German Federal Police (BKA), organized a ten-day joint training course, which brought together 35 officials from Member States and RECs. The objective was to cultivate a culture of information sharing among intelligence agencies, covering intelligence processing, analytical techniques, information evaluation, inference development, as well as intelligence-led decision-making. The training also saw, for the first time, the participation of representatives from the Somali National Security Agency (SNSA), who received, in addition to the training, IT equipment to facilitate exchange of information with the ACSRT and the AMISOM-TFG Fusion Centre, based in Mogadishu.

(c) Enhancing criminal justice response to terrorism and transnational crime in the Sahel region

26. From 3 to 5 June 2012, in Algiers, the Commission organized a workshop on enhancing criminal justice response to terrorism and transnational crime in the Sahel region. The main objectives of the workshop were to improve knowledge among officials for the effective implementation of international legal instruments on terrorism and transnational crime and their incorporation into national legislation; and to strengthen states' capacity for international and regional cooperation through improved information exchange and coordination. The workshop also considered and discussed the implementation of the 2012 updated recommendations of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF).

(d) Evaluation visits

27. As part of the implementation of the ACSRT Strategic Plan of Activity, and as a follow-up to a project launched in 2011, during which 6 Member States in West Africa and the Sahel region were visited, the ACSRT is currently undertaking evaluation visits to a number of Member States in East Africa. A team, led by the Special Representative on Counter-Terrorism Cooperation and Director of ACSRT, visited Uganda, from 17 to 21 September 2012; Burundi, from 24 to 28 September 2012; Djibouti, from 1 to 5 October 2012; and Burkina Faso, from 5 to 9 November 2012. Further visits are planned during 2012, to The Gambia and Senegal.

28. The team held extensive technical level meetings and consultations with different government agencies. These meetings made it possible to assess the capacity of the concerned Member States to fulfill their commitments under the 2002 AU Plan of Action and relevant AU decisions and instruments; evaluate the capacity of the respective National Focal Points in implementing the tasks set out in the AU Plan of Action and the Code of Conduct regulating the relationship between the ACSRT and the Focal Points; and to develop recommendations on measures to be taken by the visited Member States and identify areas in which they may require technical assistance.

29. While the level of threats in the evaluated countries varies, some of them share a number of common vulnerabilities. These include vast and unoccupied landmasses with poor policing and Government control. Cross-border counter-terrorism and anti-crime cooperation, including through border management and intelligence sharing, remains inadequate. Some of the visited Member States continue to lack either proper legislation and/or effective criminal justice systems that are essential for combating terrorism, crime and corruption. In addition to the capacity gaps, differences in threat perception have also compounded the challenges facing the countries visited.

(e) AU Counter- Terrorism Model Law

30. Council will recall that the 17th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of the Union, held in Malabo, in July 2011, welcomed the steps taken by the Commission towards the elaboration of the Model Law, requested it to disseminate the Law to all stakeholders and encouraged Member States to take full advantage of it to strengthen and update their national legislations. It further requested the Commission to avail the technical expertise that may be required by Member States. In this respect, the Commission has circulated the Model Law to all Member States and encouraged those interested to submit requests for technical and legal assistance, in order to strengthen and update their national legislation.

V. REGIONAL AND OTHER INITIATIVES

31. The Commission has launched a number of regional and other initiatives aimed at preventing and combating terrorism. These make it possible to pool efforts and resources in a coordinated fashion, in support of the AU counter-terrorism agenda.

(a) AMISOM-led Fusion and Liaison Unit

32. In order to strengthen the capacity of the Somali security agencies and enhance information sharing, AMISOM has established, with the support of the ACSRT, a Fusion and Liaison Unit in Mogadishu, to facilitate information and intelligence gathering, analysis and dissemination. This has enabled AMISOM and the Somali Government to carry out knowledge-based and timely action. The Unit also monitors the situation in the areas under the Somali

Government control and works towards the establishment of similar structures in the four sectors in which the Mission is deployed. Securing borders and ensuring that terrorist and criminal elements are not allowed free movement in the region is also a priority issue. In this regard, AMISOM conducts regular meetings with law enforcement agencies of the neighboring countries to share information and coordinate activities relating to border security. To enhance this mechanism and ensure effective coordination through the timely exchange of actionable intelligence, AMISOM, with the support of the ACSRT, is taking the necessary steps to expand the UFL to include officers and representatives of law enforcement agencies from the neighboring countries.

33. AMISOM is cognizant of the fact that it must devote equal attention to peace-building and post-conflict reconstruction and development, in order to sustain the military gains on the ground. In this respect, the Mission implements a number of Quick Impact Projects (QIPs) to ensure that peace dividends are delivered to local communities. Particular attention will be paid to this issue in the context of the strategic review of the implementation of AMISOM mandate soon to be launched by the Commission, with a view to determining how best the Mission can further contribute to the stabilization of Somalia and the successful implementation of the priorities set by the Somali Government, in close coordination with an empowered and restructured National Somali Defence and Security Sector.

34. Countering radicalization and Al-Shabaab's violent rhetoric and agenda is also one of the very important goals of AMISOM. The Mission and the Somali authorities engage Imams and religious scholars in sensitizing local communities and providing a counter-narrative to violent extremism. In this respect, mosques and Islamic schools, or *Madrassas*, are being rehabilitated to provide a platform for community mobilization.

(b) Sahel

35. In the **Sahel**, and taking into consideration the multi-dimensional nature of the problems facing the region, the AU and UN convened, from 14 to 15 March 2012, in Addis Ababa, a meeting of experts to review the situation and make recommendations on the best way forward. The experts' meeting was a follow up to the recommendations of the ministerial consultative meeting that was convened in Addis Ababa on 21 January 2012, on the margins of the AU Summit, to consider the report of the joint UN-AU multi-disciplinary mission to the Sahel region to assess the impact of the Libyan crisis, which took place from 7 to 23 December 2011. The meeting agreed on priority actions, including in the area of terrorism. The conclusions of the experts' meeting were endorsed by the 314th meeting of Council, held in Bamako, on 20 March 2012 [Declaration PSC/MIN/DECL.(CCCIV)].

36. The Commission is currently in the process of opening an office in Bamako and enhancing the human resources and operational capacity of its existing field offices in the region, particularly in the core countries. This enhanced field presence will facilitate the implementation of the AU Sahel Programme (SAPROG), on the basis of the conclusions of the

experts' meeting, as endorsed by Council, and the Strategic Concept for the Resolution of the Crises in Mali, adopted by Council at its 339th meeting, held on 24 October 2012 [PSC/MIN/COMM.2(CCCXXXIX)]. The Strategic Concept has a component on terrorism and transnational organized crime.

(c) RCI-LRA

37. In **Central Africa**, following the operationalization of the Headquarters of the Regional Task Force (RTF), in March 2012, South Sudan and Uganda handed over, on 18 September 2012, 2,000 and 500 troops, respectively, as their contribution to the RTF. A few days earlier, CAR had handed over to the RTF 350 soldiers, as part of the battalion of 450 that it pledged to contribute. Consultations are underway with the DRC for the materialization of its pledge.

38. With the support of the international partners, the regional military operations against the LRA have continued to register significant progress, notably since the capture, in May 2012, of Caesar Acellam, former number four on the LRA hierarchy of command. Several former LRA fighters have since surrendered, while others have been killed or captured, and many former abductees rescued in the CAR. In August 2012, the Uganda People's Defense Force (UPDF) successfully raided the hide-out of Dominic Ongwen, one of the indicted LRA commanders. Recently, the team of US Military Advisors deployed in the region published photos of the indicted LRA leaders in public places in south-eastern CAR, to enable the population identify and promptly report their movements to the regional troops.

VI. ENGAGEMENT WITH PARTNERS

39. The Commission continues to engage regional and international organizations and bilateral partners to mobilize support for Member States and contribute to the promotion of a coordinated global action against terrorism. During the period under review, various consultations and activities have been undertaken in this regard.

(a) Security Council open debate on the Impact of Transnational Organized Crime on Peace and Stability in West Africa and the Sahel region

40. On 21 February 2012, the Special Representative participated in the UN Security Council open debate on the *Impact of Transnational Organized Crime on Peace and Stability in West Africa and the Sahel region*. He seized the opportunity to highlight AU's efforts in this respect and called for enhanced international coordination and support to Africa. The debate was organized by the Togolese Republic, in its capacity as president of the Security Council for the month of April 2012.

(b) Participation in evaluation missions of UN Security Council resolution 1373(2001)

41. As part of its cooperation with the UN, the ACSRT joined the UN Counter-Terrorism Executive Directorate (CTED) on visits to evaluate the implementation of UN Security Council resolutions 1373(2001) and 1624(2005) in Botswana, Swaziland, Zambia and Djibouti. These visits are also aimed at facilitating the provision of necessary support to the countries concerned.

(c) 3rd Biennial Review of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy

42. In June 2012, the Special Representative participated in the 3rd Biennial Review of the 2006 UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. Subsequently, the General Assembly adopted a resolution renewing its unwavering commitment to strengthening international cooperation to prevent and combat all forms of this scourge, and emphasizing the need to promote worldwide solidarity in support of the victims of terrorist acts.

(d) Global Counter-Terrorism Forum (GCTF) Conference on Victims of Terrorism

43. From 9 to 10 July 2012, the Commission participated in the High-Level Conference on Victims of Terrorism, organized by the Global Counter-Terrorism Forum (GCTF) in Madrid, Spain. The Conference provided an opportunity for experts from GCTF members, the UN, and other relevant multilateral organizations to share best practices on the role that States can play in supporting and assisting victims of terrorism, and to learn from victims of terrorism and representatives of victims' associations on the diverse ways they can contribute to countering the extremist narrative and, more broadly, preventing terrorism. The Conference adopted the Madrid Declaration and Plan of Action on Victims of Terrorism, to which the AU made substantive inputs to reflect the peculiarities of the African context.

VII. OBSERVATIONS

44. During the period under review, the continent has continued to be faced with the threat of terrorism. I commend Member States and the RECs for their efforts and assure them of AU's full support. I note with satisfaction that Council, at its 311th meeting, held on 20 February 2012, reviewed the document prepared by the Commission regarding the mandate, composition and functions of its Sub-Committee on Counter-Terrorism. The Sub-Committee will have an important role in steering the work of Council in line with article 3 (d) and article 7 (i) of the Protocol Relating to the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council. The Commission looks forward to the early operationalization of this subsidiary organ.

45. I also wish to express appreciation to the United Nations, the European Union and the bilateral partners for their support to the AU's efforts. Throughout the period under review, the Commission has maintained close contact with the partners and benefitted from their assistance. Continued coordination of efforts with them is essential for the achievements of the

objectives set.

46. Critical to the success of the efforts being made is the early signature and ratification by the Member States that have not yet done so of all existing African and international instruments on terrorism. I am pleased to inform Council that, since my last report, Benin and Lesotho have deposited their instruments of ratification, 2004 Protocol to the Convention on the Prevention and combating of terrorism, on 11 and 17 October 2012, respectively. The Protocol requires one additional ratification to enter into force. I appeal, once again, to all Member States that have not yet done so to take steps to become parties to the Protocol and other relevant international instruments. Equally critical is the effective implementation of the commitments made, particularly with regard to information and intelligence sharing and joint monitoring of borders. I also appeal to the Member States that have not yet done so to designate Focal Points to ensure effective liaison with the ACSRT.

47. Countering radicalization and extremism lies at the heart of the efforts to address the conditions that are conducive to the spread of terrorism. It is a long-term process that requires the development of sound national policies and programs based on a thorough understanding of the radicalization threat. Terrorist acts cannot be justified under any circumstances. However, the fact that some segments of society may have sympathy for extremist and terrorist groups warrants a closer look at domestic grievances, ideological tendencies and trust gap between Government and population. Hence the need for Member States to adopt counter-radicalization and de-radicalization policies and programmes that encompass engaging and working with civil society, including community leaders and religious authorities, formal and informal educational institutes, addressing socio-economic problems to reduce vulnerability to extremist ideology, legislation reform, prison rehabilitation programs and building national capacities, to ensure effective implementation and sustainability of related measures.

48. The need to develop effective criminal justice systems to combat terrorism cannot be overemphasized. Member States must invest in counter-terrorism legal regimes and criminal justice systems that respect and protect human rights, further enhance the credibility of public authorities, ensure popular support to counter-terrorism policies. In this regard, I reiterate the Commission's readiness to provide assistance to Member States in the implementation of the African Model Law.

49. The payment of ransoms remains topical on our agenda. Its consequences are manifested by the current unfortunate situation in the Sahel. The AU is cognisant of the challenges facing Member States in their efforts to curb the financing of terrorism while having to fulfill their primary obligation of protecting their citizens. However, the payment of ransom should also be seen for what it is – rewarding criminal behavior and not only encouraging, but also actively financing further abductions and terrorist attacks, thereby endangering many more innocent lives in the continent and beyond.

50. Since the adoption of decision Assembly/AU/Dec.256(XIII) by the 13th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of the Union, in July 2009, the Commission has been advocating outlawing the payment of ransom to terrorist groups for the release of hostages. I call for renewed and coordinated efforts that would lead to the adoption by the Security Council of a binding resolution against the payment of ransom to terrorist groups, as well as towards the launching of negotiations, at the level of the General Assembly, to elaborate a Protocol on the prohibition of the payment of ransom.

51. The ACSRT is the main AU body for the implementation of the counter-terrorism framework. Despite the significant work it has done over the past months, it continues to operate with limited human and financial resources. Therefore, I urge Member States to provide the necessary support to the ACSRT. I also call on our partners to continue and strengthen their support to the Centre.

52. In concluding, I would like to express my profound sympathy and solidarity with all the victims of terrorism. I also pay tribute to those who continue to work for the well-being of the victims and speak against terrorism, extremism and violence. The Commission is fully committed to leveraging the voices of the victims and to provide them with the necessary platform and support to this effect.