

World must do more to tackle 'shadowy' mercenary activities undermining stability in Africa, says UN chief

"From antiquity to the medieval era to the present-day, those who fight for financial reward or other material compensation have been [a near constant](#) on the battlefield", [Secretary-General Antonio Guterres](#) told the Council, noting that the shadowy nature of mercenary activities has evolved over the years.

"Today they are exploiting and feeding off other ills such as transnational organized crime, terrorism and violent extremism", he told the meeting, which was [convened by Equatorial Guinea](#), which holds the Council's presidency for the month.

Their activities in Africa require "work across the spectrum", Mr. Guterres stated, "from prevention to prosecution, and from mitigating the impacts of mercenary activities to addressing the root causes that give rise to them".

He zeroed-in on mercenary activities in the Sahel, Cote d'Ivoire, Central African Republic, Cameroon and Equatorial Guinea and emphasized specific actions needed to resist their scourge, including strengthening legal regimes and frameworks.

Mr. Guterres vowed that the [UN Regional Office for Central Africa](#) and the [UN Regional Centre](#) for Peace and Disarmament in Africa would continue to help advance the African Union's 'Silencing the guns by 2020' agenda.

He pointed to the importance of cooperation, such as mixed border commissions, joint border security monitoring mechanisms and intelligence-sharing between national defense forces, highlighting as "vital", strategic partnership between the UN, African Union (AU), Economic Community of Central Africa States and region countries.

He also said it was critical to create opportunities for youth to reduce "the lure of mercenaries and the threat of radicalization" – underscoring that the [Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)](#) can help with this and more.

He concluded with the UN's promise of continued support in "tackling mercenary activities".

African Union Commission Chair calls for bolstered international support to tackle scourge

Speaking via teleconference from Addis Ababa, Moussa Faki Mahamat, Chairperson of the AU Commission, recalled since the 1960s, the continent's history has been "punctuated by the of involvement of mercenaries in activities of destabilization, including coups, interventions in armed conflicts and attempts to seize control of natural resources in the countries

concerned” – endangering the harmonious development of African States.

While efforts have been made over the years to combat the scourge, mercenaries persist.

“It is clear that we have to strengthen international instruments as they relate to this phenomenon”, he maintained.

Moreover, Mr. Faki Mahamat said he “could not stress enough” the need for disarmament, demobilization and reintegration in countries emerging from conflict.

He concluded by calling for “increased international support”.



UN Photo/Cia Pak

Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo, President of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea and President of the Security Council for the month of February, chairs the Council meeting on threats to international peace and security.

For his part, Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo, the President of Equatorial Guinea, said that after more than 50 years of independence, most African countries have yet to know peace or socioeconomic development, “despite the great economic potential they have in natural resources”.

“Africa remains the least developed continent” he attested, calling mercenaries one of “the potential causes of this delay”.

Mr. Mbasogo spoke of five different attempts in his own country over the last quarter century, with the last attempt thwarted by Angola, Zimbabwe and Cameroon.

Speaking on behalf of Rwandan President Paul Kagame, Foreign Minister Richard Sezibera also underscored Africa’s history of mercenaries, saying they have

“presented a grave threat to the independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity of Member States”.

He recounted the 1977 definition of mercenaries, which he said “may no longer be adequate to describe” today’s activities “of the worrying increase of transboundary criminal networks...many connected to global terrorist networks”.

Rwanda is no stranger to the scourge.

“Today, mercenaries are not only involved in active combat, we now see an increase in cyber attacks and industrial espionage carried out by mercenary groups within the comfort of their own homes”, he said.

As they continue to evolve and innovate, he argued: “We should not be static in our response” but update existing legal instruments to meet the unfolding challenges.

UN chief recommends actions to combat mercenaries:

- Bolster legal regimes, globally and nationally, including the 1989 [International Convention against the Recruitment, Use, Financing and Training of Mercenaries](#).
- Increase bilateral, regional and international cooperation, with a focus on border management to stem the flow of weapons and foreign armed actors throughout Central Africa.
- Examine the political, economic, social and psychological factors that promote mercenary activities, such as exclusion, poor governance, inequitable public services and no protection for minorities and other vulnerable groups.