Statement by Mr. Pawan Kapoor, Joint Secretary, at the High-level Meeting on SAHEL convened by the Secretary General on the sidelines of 67th Session of United Nations General Assembly on September 26, 2012

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Let me begin by commending the initiative of the Secretary General to organize this timely high-level meeting on the Sahel to discuss the multitude of challenges that the region is faced with. We hope that today’s deliberations will help crystallize the United Nations approach on the Sahel region.

2. Mr. Chairman, the region has long faced several challenges in political, economic and humanitarian spheres. Over the past year, these challenges have been aggravated by the crisis in the neighborhood. Proliferation of weapons, activities of rebel and terrorist groups and transnational organized crimes have taken a heavy toll on the political, security and humanitarian situation in the region. Existing ethnic and religious differences have been exacerbated, and a large number of people have been adversely affected. The instability in northern Mali clearly demonstrates the seriousness of the situation in the region.

3. Mr. Chairman, the situation has been made all the more worse by the late and insufficient rainfall this year, thereby affecting the agricultural harvest in the region. Almost 5 million people across the region have been affected by food and nutrition crises. It is time for the international community to live up to its responsibility to adequately respond to the multiple crises in the Sahel and support and supplement the initiatives of regional and sub-regional organizations.

4. Mr. Chairman, we believe that the UN strategy should comprehensively assess the situation, clearly identify the problems, and present a holistic approach to tackle the issues in both the short- and long-term. While governance, development, and capacity building of State institutions require long-term planning and an integrated response, the immediate priorities should include stabilization of the security situation by addressing threats of secessionist, extremist and Al Qaida-linked terrorist groups, the provision of humanitarian assistance, and inclusive political processes.

5. In the implementation of the UN strategy, primacy should be given to national ownership by capacity building of national institutions. Regional and sub-regional organizations should be fully involved, and their initiatives should be supported by the provision of adequate resources. There should also be better integration and coordination among the UN and other agencies on the ground to ensure effective implementation of the strategy.

6. Mr. Chairman, the deteriorating situation in Mali is of serious concern to us. Extremist and terrorist groups have consolidated their position, and have indulged in serious crimes igniting sectarian strife. The presence of foreign elements, associated
with Al Qaida and Boko Haram, shows that northern Mali is developing into a regional hub of terrorist groups. The international community should urgently address this crisis since it also has the potential to destabilize the larger region.

7. The United Nations should seriously consider the initiatives taken by ECOWAS and the African Union to address the crisis in the Sahel region. India, on its part, is committed to partner with the UN, the AU and other organizations in the implementation of an integrated strategy for the Sahel.

    I thank you.

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