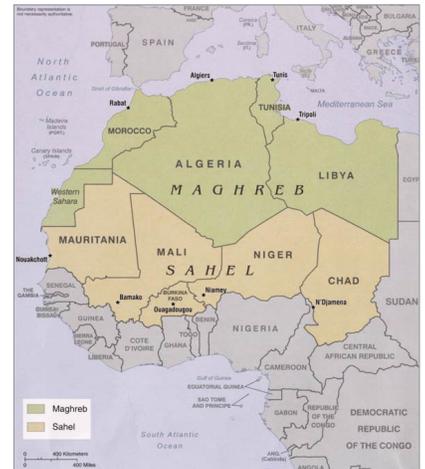## The Origins of Justice and Security Dialogues

USIP started its first Justice and Security Dialogue in Nepal in 2007 to restore trust between police and communities following a 10-year civil war. The dialogue gathered security forces and civil society groups who jointly devised solutions to combat drug abuse and dispel prejudices among ethnic and religious groups, and resolved violent disputes.

STATE OF THE FIELD

When violent conflict erupts, its roots often must be found and healed at the community level. Amid such turmoil, however, government officials, police, and community leaders are likely to mistrust each other—a breakdown in relations that opens space for security threats, including violent extremism and organized crime.

Africa's Sahel and Maghreb regions contain some 200 million people across more than a dozen countries that face myriad domestic conflicts. Extremist groups— ISIS, Boko Haram, Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and others—have expanded their influence. So these countries and peoples need ways to resolve local conflicts before they escalate, a process that requires good relations between security forces and the citizens they serve. But in most of these countries, authoritarian governments for decades ruled largely through people's fear of their security forces. In much of the region, trust between police and the people they serve is often weak. Tensions typically are deepened by poor governance, weak state institutions, and masses of people uprooted from their homes by conflicts. In these countries, almost no mechanisms exist to bring security officials and civilians together to address security challenges.

USIP'S WORK

For a decade worldwide, and since 2015 in the Sahel and Maghreb, the U.S. Institute of Peace has promoted justice and security reforms in part through an approach it pioneered—Justice and

Security Dialogues. These community-level dialogues bring security and justice providers together with local residents to dispel mistrust and build cooperation to tackle urgent security concerns.

USIP teams, working with local partners, first gather representatives of all the relevant groups in a community to discuss and collectively identify what has gone wrong. The dialogues then lead the community toward practical, concrete solutions of its security problems—which can range from robberies and break-ins to weapons smuggling. Overall, the process emphasizes openness and transparency, and generally lasts for a year or longer.

In Justice and Security Dialogues, USIP and its local partners lead communities to make changes by sponsoring outreach campaigns and policy forums, and by mentoring participants. They promote and develop relationships, mutual understanding, and knowledge-sharing among residents, government officials and police. The result is citizens who are active in the safety of their community, and a more effective and accountable local security force.

USIP has conducted Justice and Security Dialogues in 12 countries confronting domestic turmoil, from Burma to Tanzania. The process is now being used in six localities of the Sahel and Maghreb regions: in Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, and Tunisia. Recent achievements include:

- **Improving trust.** A rise in robberies and break-ins in Saaba, a rural locality in southern Burkina Faso, only exacerbated existing tensions between police and a local vigilante group. Dialogue has led the two forces to cooperate, with both working collectively to improve security and reduce criminal activity in the region.
- **Creating joint solutions to security problems.** In Senegal, a dialogue in a region of Dakar improved the sharing of information between community members and police. Residents who once saw the police as adversaries now consider them partners. Together, they reduced recurrent clashes between local sports fans and church-goers by relocating a sports stadium entrance that had faced a church.
- **Repairing ruptures between police and communities.** In Nigeria, residents in a neighborhood of the city of Jos burned down the police station and forced police out of their community. Spurred by dialogue, community members donated land for a new station, and cooperated with police to get it built and restore police services.