



## Security Council

Distr.: General  
14 January 2021

Original: English

---

### **Letter dated 13 January 2021 from the President of the Security Council addressed to the Secretary-General and the Permanent Representatives of the members of the Security Council**

I have the honour to enclose herewith a copy of the briefing provided by Mr. Mohamed Ibn Chambas, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel, as well as the statements delivered by the representatives of China, Estonia, France, India, Ireland, Kenya (on behalf of the three African members of the Council — Kenya, the Niger and Tunisia — and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines), Mexico, Norway, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the United States of America and Viet Nam in connection with the video-teleconference on “Peace consolidation in West Africa” convened on Monday, 11 January 2021.

In accordance with the procedure set out in the letter dated 7 May 2020 by the President of the Security Council addressed to the Permanent Representatives of the members of the Council (S/2020/372), a procedure agreed in the light of the extraordinary circumstances caused by the coronavirus disease pandemic, this briefing and statements will be issued as an official document of the Security Council.

*(Signed)* Tarek **Ladeb**  
President of the Security Council



**Annex I****Briefing by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel, Mohamed Ibn Chambas**

I am honoured to brief the Security Council today on the latest report (S/2020/1293) of the Secretary-General on the activities of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS).

At the start, permit me to congratulate the new members — India, Ireland, Kenya, Mexico and Norway — on joining the Council

This briefing is being held against the backdrop of a year of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, which triggered multiple challenges that have affected all countries worldwide without exception, plunging most countries of the region into recession and leading to a diversion of resources from productive investments and the fight against insecurity.

Notwithstanding the challenges, I would like to commend the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and its member States for their handling of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has been successful in containing the fallout, supporting the vulnerable and mitigating economic disruptions.

Now that we are facing a second wave of the pandemic, and while are relieved that vaccines are being distributed, it is ever-more important that we collaborate to apply the manifold lessons learned in terms of improving governance and delivering essential services for societies to emerge more adept, secure and resilient.

Nowhere has that resilience been more sorely tested than in the Sahel, where an ever-more volatile climate has brought about massive floods, affecting more than 1.7 million people and resulting in the destruction of houses and livelihoods.

I also salute the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel (G5-Sahel), working in tandem with multiple international partners, including the French Operation Barkhane force and the European Takuba Task Force, as well as the Multinational Joint Task Force and the national armies of Sahel and Lake Chad basin countries, which together have fought gallantly against militants and extremists on several fronts.

Yet insecurity continues to prevail and to harm innocent lives. Following the end of the rainy season, militants have again staged audacious deadly attacks, notably in the Niger, where more than 100 people died in just one assault nine days ago. Despite important successes, insecurity has expanded to new areas previously considered safe, such as north-west Nigeria, where militants collude with bandits and other criminal networks. In addition, according to the International Maritime Bureau, 90 per cent of worldwide incidents of maritime piracy and hijacking occur in the Gulf of Guinea.

As a result of prevailing insecurity, the humanitarian situation has been further aggravated, triggering new population displacements and rising to a cumulative figure of 5 million people, which is 1.4 million higher than in 2019. Behind those figures are millions of human lives that are devastated and hundreds of thousands of children who are deprived of life-changing education.

Since my previous report to the Council (see S/2020/706), five presidential, three legislative and two local elections were held in West Africa. Despite COVID-19, electoral management bodies were able to maintain the electoral calendar and demonstrated impressive technical capacity to organize and conduct elections. Increasingly, elections have also been funded exclusively from national budgets.

Notwithstanding challenges and unacceptable levels of violence in Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire, the polls overall went well.

In Burkina Faso, dialogue among political actors led to an outcome that was accepted by all, with the losing contenders congratulating President Roch Marc Christian Kaboré for his second term and committing to work together to tackle insecurity. The recent appointment of a Minister of National Reconciliation is a step in the right direction.

I also commend the peaceful conduct of the general elections in the Niger on 27 November, which is set to usher in the country's first-ever democratic transition from one elected Head of State to another. During my recent visit to the country, I appealed to Nigeriens to maintain that exemplary posture for the holding of the second round of the presidential election, scheduled for 21 February.

In Ghana, which already has a tradition of peaceful handovers, elections were peaceful overall, while remaining disagreements about the results are being decided in the courts.

In support of those processes, UNOWAS conducted stakeholders' forums in Burkina Faso, Ghana and the Niger, at which candidates and national stakeholders committed to consultative, consensual processes, contributing to the peaceful outcomes in those countries. I also undertook several good-offices missions to Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire prior to, during and after the elections. Throughout, UNOWAS worked hand in hand with ECOWAS, the African Union and other international partners.

In addition, as we speak, new consultations among political parties for a possible reassessment of the draft constitution are ongoing in the Gambia, after the draft was rejected by Parliament in September, despite two years of broad-based consultations at home and with the diaspora.

In Côte d'Ivoire, I am encouraged by the appointment of a Minister of National Reconciliation and the start of a national dialogue process to rebuild national cohesion after an electoral process fraught with disagreements. I salute the announcement by the Front populaire ivoirien to compete in the upcoming legislative elections. With only two months until the polls, which are scheduled for 6 March, I urge all national actors to overcome personal grievances and make gestures of genuine reconciliation to leave behind the long shadows of the past and turn a decisive page towards a united, prosperous Côte d'Ivoire.

In Benin, with presidential elections due in April, I appeal to the national authorities and all political actors to find common ground to make the polls more inclusive than the legislative elections of 2019, which resulted in post-election violence.

Elections are one-time events, but democracy is a constant process of deliberation and consultation, and dialogue is one important arena for the building of national consensus. In this vein, I welcome the outreach by President Mohamed Ould Cheikh El Ghazouani of Mauritania to the opposition and communities that have historically been marginalized.

In Guinea, incidents of political and intercommunal violence have claimed more lives. Regrettably, the elections have deepened rather than reconciled deep-seated grievances. It is my wish that Guineans work together to set the country on a path of dialogue to consensually address the contentious issues that impacted the recent electoral cycle. That would be the pathway to strengthen social cohesion and inclusion, promote reconciliation and ultimately unlock the country's enormous potential.

In neighbouring Guinea-Bissau, the closure of the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau, on 31 December after 20 years of a United Nations field mission presence in the country, marked an auspicious moment for Bissau-Guineans to come together and agree on a new Constitution that is more adapted to the country's specificities, breaking the cycle of political upheavals, violence and complex governance challenges. Learning from other United Nations mission closures and transitions, together with ECOWAS, the United Nations Resident Coordinator and the United Nations country team, we have established solid collaborative mechanisms to accompany Guinea-Bissau on the way forward.

In addressing the multidimensional challenges in the Sahel, UNOWAS is closely collaborating with the G-5 Sahel to support the implementation of the priority investments programme and the Lake Chad Basin Commission Regional Stabilization, Recovery and Resilience Strategy. With more outreach to donors, the support plan for the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel has focused on cross-border and cross-cutting issues, including protection, human rights and climate change.

Women and youth in the region have been hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic. A joint assessment conducted by UNOWAS in collaboration with ECOWAS on the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000) showed progress in the areas of coordination and programming. I am encouraged that action plans are now in place in 14 out of the region's 16 countries. I am also pleased that the Council continues to give the matter its utmost attention. Girls' education remains a critically important lever for development. Political will and resources to implement the various instruments, especially education for girls, must therefore remain a priority.

We need to confront the all-too-well known root causes of exclusion, strengthen democratic governance and give a new and decisive push to fight insecurity.

I would like to express my appreciation for the Council's continued support to the implementation of the UNOWAS mandate, while reiterating our commitment to continue accompanying national and regional actors to enhance peace and stability in West Africa and the Sahel.

---

**Annex II****Statement by the Deputy Permanent Representative of China to the United Nations, Dai Bing**

[Original: Chinese]

I thank Special Representative Chambas for his briefing.

The situation in the West Africa and the Sahel region is stable on the whole. Countries in the region are actively fighting the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, and many have overcome the difficulties posed by the pandemic and completed some important political agendas, such as general elections. The United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) has actively carried out mediation and done a lot of work, which China appreciates. At the same time, countries of the region still face many challenges in maintaining peace, stability and development. In connection with the Secretary-General's report (S/2020/1293) and the situation in the region, I wish to highlight the following.

First, we should continue to support countries of the region in building up lines of defence against the pandemic. At present, amid the dire global pandemic situation, there have been some relapses in the region. For this reason, there cannot be any letting up in the anti-COVID efforts. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and UNOWAS should unite countries in the region, strengthen joint prevention and control and carry out cooperation in relation to information-sharing, detection methods and clinical treatment.

China has provided batches of anti-pandemic materials to countries of the region and sent groups of medical experts to Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea and the Gambia. We will continue to firmly support countries of the region in fighting the pandemic, provide medical materials to countries in need, exchange experience in diagnosis and treatment, promote cooperation among Chinese hospitals and their African counterparts and strive to make vaccines accessible and affordable.

Aided by China, the construction of the African Centre for Disease Control officially started a few days ago. While ensuring that the Centre is well built, we will help Africa improve its public health system and emergency response capability and help African people prevail over the pandemic at an early date.

Secondly, we should continue to consolidate overall political stability. Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Burkina Faso, Ghana and the Niger have completed general elections, and Guinea-Bissau has settled the general election-related dispute. From this new starting point onwards, the relevant parties should work together to promote national development and durable peace and stability, in the long-term interests of both the countries and the region. While Mali has started the transition process, the Gambia, Benin, Chad and Cape Verde will hold general elections this year. All parties should resolve their differences through dialogue and consultation, so as to create a favourable environment for holding elections peacefully. The international community, while respectful of the sovereignty of the countries concerned and the will of the local people, should encourage the African Union, ECOWAS and other regional and subregional organizations to play a greater role, support Africa in finding African solutions to African problems and deliver positive energy for lasting peace and stability across the region.

Thirdly, we should continue to help countries of the region to eliminate the root causes of conflict. The West Africa and Sahel region faces security challenges exemplified by Boko Haram and other terrorist organizations, pirates in the Gulf of Guinea and intercommunal conflicts. We hereby express our condolences to

the Niger for the lives lost in the most recent terrorist attacks. The international community and UNOWAS should continue to support countries of the region in improving their counter-terrorism and stability-building capacity and consolidate every link in the counter-terrorism front through material assistance and personnel training.

At the same time, poverty and underdevelopment remain sources of instability. Comprehensive measures should be taken to help countries of the region to improve governance capacity, alleviate and eliminate poverty, provide basic security and safety for the people and eliminate breeding grounds for terrorism. It is hoped that UNOWAS will strengthen communication and coordination with other United Nations agencies, ECOWAS and the African Union to play to each other's strengths and form synergy in promoting regional peace and stability.

Fourthly, we should continue to support countries of the region in promoting development and prosperity. In recent years, West African countries have promoted the process of integration in general, and regional economic integration in particular, and actively participated in the construction of a free trade zone on the African continent. Their development potential has been continuously unlocked. At the same time, the negative impact of the pandemic on economic and social development has become ever-more obvious. The international community has the responsibility to help countries of the region maintain macroeconomic stability, keep the industrial and supply chains safe and unfettered, increasingly take more practical steps on official development assistance, debt relief and technology transfer and support countries of the region in achieving independent and sustainable development.

China has always supported the development and revitalization of the region. Since last year, in the face of difficulties posed by the pandemic, we have ensured the smooth construction or completion of a number of major projects, such as hydropower plants, roads, bridges, stadiums and so forth. Responding actively to the Group of Twenty's Debt Service Suspension Initiative, China has given concrete support to countries such as Cape Verde, the Gambia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Togo in overcoming the difficulties. China will continue to firmly support countries of the region in accelerating economic recovery by, among other things, establishing a fast track for personnel exchanges with countries in need, so as to help countries of the region stabilize their economies, ensure employment and improve people's livelihoods.

## Annex III

### **Statement by the Deputy Permanent Representative of Estonia to the United Nations, Gert Auväärt**

I would like to thank Special Representative Chambas for his comprehensive briefing on the most recent developments in West Africa and the Sahel region. Estonia fully supports the work and good offices of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel under the leadership of Special Representative Chambas, which remained very active over the past six months despite the challenges posed by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. We commend the Economic Community of West African States for its role in facilitating dialogue with various national stakeholders.

Unfortunately, the negative trends in the security situation continue to characterize the developments in West Africa and Sahel region. The attacks against civilians, such as the 2 January attack in the Niger's Tillabéri region, are especially egregious and need to be condemned in strongest terms.

Every step needs to be taken to tackle the threat of terrorism and prevent it from spreading further. Estonia commends the efforts of the region's States through the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel and the Multinational Joint Task Force in addressing the transnational threat of terrorism. We encourage States to further enhance the cooperation among themselves as well as with the international community. For its part, Estonia will continue to contribute to the fight against terrorism through Operation Barkhane and the Takuba Task Force.

The past year saw significant developments in many countries of the region through the various electoral processes. While a number of the elections were conducted in a relatively peaceful environment, that was not the case everywhere. The loss of life as a result of election-related violence was especially concerning. On a positive note, however, we congratulate Togo for electing its first-ever female Prime Minister. We encourage all countries in the region to take further steps in fully, equally and meaningfully include women and youth in all stages and aspects of political processes.

A security-focused approach alone will not bring lasting peace to West Africa and the Sahel region. It is of crucial importance to understand and effectively address the root causes of conflicts and to design an approach that will take into account the various interlinkages among the security, development and the humanitarian dimensions. In that regard, one of the key aspects to consider is the adverse effects of climate change, which in many instances are further exacerbating the underlying grievances along community lines.

Another key aspect in bringing societies back together is reconciliation and the restoration of the State's presence. Making sure that all perpetrators of human rights abuses and violations as well as violations of international humanitarian law are being held accountable regardless of their status and systematically fighting against the culture of impunity are essential in restoring the trust of the people. It is only through full political ownership by the region's countries that long-lasting stability in the region can be achieved.

Finally, we remain concerned about the worsening humanitarian situation, and not only as a result of the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. We call on all parties to allow humanitarian access and facilitate the delivery of emergency assistance to populations in need, especially to society's more vulnerable.

**Annex IV****Statement by the Permanent Representative of France to the United Nations, Nicolas de Rivière**

[Original: English and French]

I thank Special Representative Chambas for his briefing. I would like to underline two points.

First, the elections that took place recently in several West African countries are a sign of the consolidation of democratic institutions in the region. However, they posed a number of challenges. Some were marked by high tensions and restrictions on civil freedoms. France condemned the violence that caused a number of deaths on the margins of some of those elections.

In Guinea, we encourage all stakeholders to take responsibility and exercise the utmost restraint. We also call on the authorities to take concrete decisions regarding dialogue and openness towards the opposition. The issue here is to allow for reconciliation among all Guineans. They deserve a peaceful political climate and effective improvement in governance, which are the foundation of the country's development.

In Côte d'Ivoire, peace must now be the objective of all. We note that President Ouattara announced new gestures during his inaugural speech. In particular, I would mention the appointment of a Minister of National Reconciliation and the reform of the Independent Electoral Commission. Those are positive initiatives. Other measures could usefully be taken to contribute to the peace and reconciliation process, particularly with a view towards the legislative elections.

Finally, in Ghana, the elections were held in exemplary conditions — a credit to the country's democratic tradition and to the civic sense of the Ghanaian people.

My second point refers to the situation in the Sahel. Despite immense challenges, the elections in Burkina Faso and the first round of the presidential election in the Niger were held without major security incidents and in a serene atmosphere. In Burkina Faso, the entire political class demonstrated a spirit of consensus. In the Niger, President Issoufou's decision to not run for a third term was a factor in reducing tension. As a primary partner to the Niger, we will continue to closely follow the preparations for, and the holding of, the second round of the presidential election. In that regard, we deplore the attacks of 2 January, which claimed the lives of several civilians, and extend our condolences to the people and the Government of the Niger.

The security situation remains the main challenge in the Sahel. France pays tribute to the memory of the soldiers who recently lost their lives, including five French nationals. This painful news should not overshadow the successes of Operation Barkhane and of the Group of Five for the Sahel (G-5 Sahel). The terrorists continue to harass, but they are being pushed back. And the joint operations of France and its partners will continue.

The mobilization in the face of the magnitude of the challenges in the Sahel remains insufficient. In the spirit of the Coalition for the Sahel, we should combine security support with support for governance, human rights and development. At the national level, we encourage the authorities of the Sahel countries to strengthen the presence of the State in outlying areas. At the international level, the Joint Force of the G-5 Sahel deserves greater support, including from the United Nations. We also welcome the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel. We encourage its implementation in a more pragmatic and concrete manner. It must rapidly produce the results expected by the populations.

---

**Annex V****Statement by the Permanent Representative of India to the United Nations, T.S. Tirumurti**

At the outset, let me begin by thanking the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Mohamed Ibn Chambas, for his briefing on the latest report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS)(S/2020/1293) and the implementation of the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel. His personal commitment and efforts to help countries in West Africa deserve our appreciation.

I once again convey our deepest condolences for the vicious terrorist attack in the Niger, which we strongly condemn. We stand in solidarity with the Government and the people of the Niger in the fight against terrorism.

Presidential elections held in Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso, Ghana and the Niger have further consolidated democracy in West Africa. Although those elections had their share of political tensions, violence and electoral disputes, stakeholders had recourse to legal means for resolving those disputes, which is an encouraging sign of growing confidence in, and respect for, constitutional bodies.

The joint regional efforts involving the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Union, ably supported by UNOWAS, have had a positive impact on election processes. The increasing participation of women in Government and decision-making processes in many West African countries is another positive development. We also join others in expressing our appreciation for the role played by the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau, which has now completed its mandate, in bringing peace and stability to Guinea-Bissau.

India welcomes those positive developments and congratulates the people and the leadership of those countries for reaffirming their faith in democracy and their commitment to sustainable peace and development. As the world's largest democracy, we are convinced that effective and strong governance structures will help stabilize peace, safeguard fundamental rights, protect the rule of law and make governance more representative, transparent, responsive and human-centric.

Before we address the situation in Mali, I express our deep condolences for the deaths of French soldiers involved in Operation Barkhane in Mali earlier this month.

We acknowledge the role of ECOWAS in facilitating the swift civilian-led transition in Mali and fully support Mali's transitional Government. The quest for sustainable peace in Mali requires a comprehensive and inclusive approach. The last eight years exposed the limitations of overdependence on military solutions to redress the problem of violence in Mali and the wider Sahel region.

We believe that the following are fundamental for the restoration of peace and stability in Mali: the full implementation of the 2015 Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali, emanating from the Algiers process; political and administrative reforms, including the decentralization of powers for the adequate political participation of marginalized sections of society; swift disarmament, demobilization and reintegration; and electoral reforms.

It is indeed laudable how countries in West Africa have effectively managed the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. As pointed out by the Secretary-General in his report, ECOWAS, Governments, national stakeholders and the people of West Africa and the Sahel deserve our commendation for their efforts to tackle the pandemic effectively. However, the impact of the economic downturn due to the

pandemic has been severe, and the countries of the region therefore need international support to cope with the crisis.

The security situation in the Sahel and Lake Chad region remains a matter of serious concern. Terrorism, drug-trafficking and organized crime have continued unabated. The terror attacks in Burkina Faso, particularly in regions bordering Mali and the Niger, have again underscored the urgent need to intensify efforts to combat terrorism, which is spilling over into other countries and regions.

The activities of Boko Haram in Nigeria and the Lake Chad region have not subsided either. The recent terror attacks by the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) were more brutal than those carried out by Boko Haram. ISWAP, supported by elements in West Asia and North Africa, is emerging as a radicalized and brutal terrorist entity, posing a serious threat to peace and stability in the region.

I would like to emphasize the need to ensure an integrated approach towards the region, because many of its problems are regional in nature and therefore require an integrated and multi-country approach. For example, the problem of the drying up of Lake Chad — which adjoins four different countries — Chad, the Niger, Nigeria and Cameroon — has caused grave socioeconomic problems and also spurred radicalization and terrorism.

We therefore need closer coordination in counter-terrorism cooperation in the region and its periphery to counter the growth of terrorist entities effectively. The coordinating role of UNOWAS, its support to national Governments and its partnership with the Group of Five for the Sahel (G-5 Sahel) and ECOWAS will be critical.

We strongly condemn the terrorist attacks on civilians as well as on national, regional and international security forces in the region and support a strong military response. The Governments of the region have shown tremendous resolve to take on terrorist groups. We commend the efforts of regional counter-terrorism initiatives, such as the G-5 Sahel Joint Force and the Multinational Joint Task Force, which is a model that illustrates the ownership taken by countries of the region for their collective security. The Security Council and the international community need to actively support those initiatives.

On the piracy front, it is a matter of concern that the Gulf of Guinea remains a piracy hotspot, with 17 incidents having occurred during the past six months. Several Indian sailors have also been victims of piracy and kidnappings. There is an urgent need to increase surveillance to ensure maritime security in the area through increased international collaboration.

While terrorism and piracy need to be effectively and decisively dealt with, the international community also needs to develop a coherent, coordinated and cooperative approach to deal with the worrisome humanitarian situation in the Sahel.

India has been steadfast in extending support to the countries of the region in their efforts to restore peace, stability and normalcy.

In the Gulf of Guinea, India is engaged in combating piracy and ensuring maritime security and safe navigation. In 2020, India became a full-fledged member of the Friends of the Gulf of Guinea of the Group of Seven.

To tackle the COVID-19 pandemic, India has been extending support to Governments in the region, including by providing essential medicines to 12 countries in West Africa. India is also participating in the Group of Twenty Debt Service Suspension Initiative to provide debt relief, including to countries in the region.

India has to date provided soft loans amounting to \$3.279 billion for projects in the agriculture, irrigation, water supply, energy, solar and health sectors. Under the auspices of the India-United Nations Development Partnership Fund, we are also providing \$9 million for livelihood projects in nine West African countries.

India has a robust security partnership with countries in the region. We have also commenced counter-terrorism training in the region. Under our Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation defence training programme, we are currently providing about 250 training slots to countries in the region. We remain committed to supporting countries in the region through capacity-building and the strengthening of democratic institutions.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate India's support for the activities of UNOWAS and its collaboration with subregional organizations in achieving political stability, lasting peace and sustainable development of the West Africa and the Sahel region.

**Annex VI****Statement by the Permanent Representative of Ireland to the United Nations, Geraldine Byrne Nason**

[Original: English and French]

At the outset, I would like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Chambas, for his briefing. Ireland fully supports the work of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS). We commend the Special Representative for his Office's important work over the past six months, as detailed in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2020/1293).

Ireland is delighted to take on the role of co-penholder, together with the Niger, of this important file. The priorities we have set for our term on the Security Council — promoting peace, supporting conflict prevention and ensuring the principle of responsibility — are also central to the UNOWAS mandate.

We will work assiduously with the rest of the Council over the next two years on our shared priorities: building peace and democracy; promoting regional solutions to cross-cutting threats to peace and security, including climate change; and promoting good governance, the rule of law, human rights and gender issues.

I take this opportunity to express my sincere condolences to Ambassador Abarry and the people of the Niger following the reprehensible attacks that recently claimed the lives of more than 100 people in the Tillabéri area.

As co-penholder, we look across the entire region and want to start off by focusing on one area of importance, to which Ireland hopes to draw attention: that of youth and education, also highlighted today by Special Representative Chambas.

We were delighted to hear Mr. Chambas emphasize that point. We know from our own experience the transformative power of education to drive development and unlock the potential of individuals and entire societies. That is especially true for adolescent girls. Education will allow them to become the next leaders, peacebuilders and change-makers.

Today we condemn the reprehensible attacks on schools that have taken place in the region in recent months. We call for investment in education in the region and for it to be prioritized, and for schools to be safeguarded everywhere.

Frankly, we have also followed with concern the deterioration of the humanitarian situation in the region over the past six months. We call on all parties to support humanitarian action, respect humanitarian principles and facilitate the delivery of essential aid to those most in need. Ireland condemns, in the strongest possible terms, any attack on humanitarian workers, who are there to provide life-saving assistance to those in need. Those responsible must be held accountable.

It is clear the humanitarian and socioeconomic consequences of the coronavirus disease are further exacerbating the already challenging situation in the region. We call on international partners to provide requisite support and ensure that everyone in Africa receives fair and equitable access to the vaccines. We all know that is a basic question of solidarity. We also know that no one is safe until everyone is safe.

The security situation in West Africa is complex. Insecurity in the Sahel and Lake Chad basin continues to be particularly worrisome. We are concerned by the significant levels of violence, including intercommunal conflict and terrorist activity. The Council has a duty to support enhanced national and regional capacities to address security in the region, including that of the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel and the Multinational Joint Task Force. We know that resources

are needed to support that work. Respect for human rights and accountability for violations and abuses are an essential part of resolving conflict and putting an end to it. We strongly endorse the emphasis in the Secretary-General's report on the role that national human-rights institutions can play in assisting security and law-enforcement institutions in carrying out their important roles.

Let us face facts: we know from our own lived experience that peace and stability cannot be achieved through an approach focused solely on security. Ireland supports UNOWAS in promoting a holistic and integrated approach to addressing instability in the region that addresses root causes. That is the correct approach. Supporting sustainable and inclusive development must be at the heart of national, regional and international efforts. We must act to promote good governance, the rule of law, human rights and the strengthening of democratic institutions.

I would like to highlight one important challenge. There is little doubt that the adverse impacts of climate change are having a pernicious and negative impact on security in West Africa and the Sahel. We see that as leading to issues such as increased farmer-herder conflict as well as to an erosion of social cohesion. We support the call by the Secretary-General to ensure that all parties work to integrate current and projected climate-related threats into all conflict-prevention efforts in the region. Ireland and the Niger will work together to ensure the capture and analysis of that threat.

Before continuing, I want to salute the perseverance of voters in West Africa amid challenging circumstances. I see that as a clear sign of their commitment to democracy. I welcome that the participation levels of women in elections have been strong, but frankly there remains a big gap. We need to see women at the decision-making tables, ensuring women's full, equal and meaningful participation in the political process. Voting is important, but we want to see women in councils, in Parliaments and in Governments, so that no effort should be spared in ensuring that women not only cast their ballots but are also on the ballot paper. As co-Chair with Mexico of the Women and Peace and Security Group, we will do everything possible to reinforce that when we can.

Any election-related violence can have a chilling effect on democratic engagement. Ireland regrets the election-related violence that took place in Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea, which resulted in tragic loss of life. We see that as simply unacceptable. We need to learn lessons, both positive and negative, from the recent elections. Ireland applauds and supports the ongoing and critical work of UNOWAS in contributing to democracy and peaceful upcoming elections in the region. Looking ahead, we call for the upcoming elections in 2021 to be held in a peaceful, democratic and fully inclusive manner. We also call on UNOWAS to continue employing its good offices and, as Mr. Chambas has done today, to keep the Security Council informed on developments in Guinea-Bissau.

Finally, we often hear rhetoric in the Security Council about regional organizations and their contribution to peace and security. Today I would like to recognize the excellent contribution of UNOWAS to regional cooperation. The challenges facing the region can be successfully addressed only through leadership from the region. Ireland looks forward to working with UNOWAS to promote enhanced regional cooperation with key partners, including the Economic Community of West African States, the African Union and the European Union, in order to promote peace and security in West Africa and the Sahel — a shared and joint endeavour.

**Annex VII****Statement by the Permanent Representative of Kenya to the United Nations, Martin Kimani**

I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the three African members of the Security Council, namely, Kenya, the Niger and Tunisia, as well as Saint Vincent and the Grenadines (A3+1).

Before delivering this statement, let me begin by conveying my sincere condolences to the people and the Government of the Niger, through Ambassador Abarry, in connection with the lives lost during the wanton attacks against innocent civilians on 2 January in the south-western region of the Niger. That heinous act demonstrates not only the volatility in the region but also the transboundary nature of the security threats there. As we stand in solidarity with the Government and the people of the Niger, our resolve should be to do whatever we can to eliminate the threat of terrorism in the region and on the continent at large.

Let me join other delegations in thanking Special Representative of the Secretary-General Mohamed Ibn Chambas for his briefing and for his dedication to promote dialogue through good offices, which have certainly contributed to overcoming political impasses in the subregion. In that regard, we remain convinced that preventive diplomacy should continue to be a priority task of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS). We also commend him for his leadership, which has seen UNOWAS efficiently discharge its mandate against the backdrop of an increasingly challenging regional environment.

We welcome the positive developments in the region, including the successful conduct of elections in Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Liberia and the Niger. We are encouraged by the fact that the people of those countries, aspiring to and longing for peace and prosperity, have shown political maturity during the elections. The region's achievements in democratic governance ought to be consolidated.

We also welcome the addition of climate-induced security threats to the UNOWAS mandate as a pragmatic acknowledgement of the clear climate-security nexus in the entire region. Beyond the excellent role being played by UNOWAS in that regard, it is our view that it is now time for the United Nations and the Security Council to engage on concrete actions on how to respond to climate and security threats, including on the proposal for the establishment of an office of a Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Climate and Security.

It is important to prioritize support for countries in the region to build resilience and ensure tangible progress in the actualization of the aspirations of the UNOWAS climate mandate. We stress the need for a holistic approach involving political, security and socioeconomic development interventions that will lead to lasting peace and stability in the region.

Furthermore, along with climate-change issues, intercommunal violence is exacerbating the fragility of the region and becoming the bedrock of recruitment for terrorists and armed groups. Recent events in the tri-border area in central Sahel, in Nigeria or in Chad are just another reminder that more concrete attention need to be dedicated to that issue. Hence the A3+1 stresses the urgent need for a holistic solution by forging a stronger partnership among the Group of Five for the Sahel (G-5 Sahel), the United Nations and development partners such as the World Bank and the European Union through a joint project that will concretely tackle the root causes of intercommunal violence and prevent their recurrence.

Also, as most challenges are often transboundary in nature and cannot as such be dealt with by a single country alone, we urge UNOWAS, the Peacebuilding Commission and all partners to give greater support to regional initiatives such as the new cross-border cooperation pilot project — the Integrated Territorial Development Project between the municipalities of the Sahel (Burkina Faso), Timbuktu (Mali) and Tillabéri (the Niger) regions, home to 5.5 million inhabitants — planned for a period of one year and financed to the tune of \$1.8 million by the West African Economic and Monetary Union.

The pervasive insecurity and political instability in the region call for the structured and focused implementation of the UNOWAS mandate to effectively address the root causes so as to progress towards sustainable development. We encourage enhanced cooperation among UNOWAS, the African Union and other subregional organizations in collaboration and coordination with key players in the region and neighbouring regions, as well as with regional and international organizations in the quest for practical solutions, including through enhancing the regional implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

The continued terrorist attacks against civilians and security and defence forces as well as peacekeepers in Burkina Faso, Mali, the Niger and the Lake Chad basin countries remains a matter of great concern. Early-warning mechanisms play a key role in the concerted efforts of the region and international partners. To that effect, we call on UNOWAS to resume supporting the G-5 Sahel's Sahelian Center for Threat Analysis and Early Warning.

We are encouraged by the United Nations support plan, which prioritizes the empowerment of women and youth for peace and development in West Africa and the Sahel, and we call on UNOWAS to redouble its efforts in supporting the various stakeholders in the region to focus on women and youth for development and peace.

The A3+1 expresses grave concern about the significant impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic on livelihoods and governance structures and systems, including electoral and political dialogue processes; humanitarian situations; socioeconomic situations; and regional and multilateral engagements, and we commend UNOWAS for its relentless efforts in support of the COVID-19 response in the region as well as the coordinated regional response led by the Economic Community of West African States.

Finally, we believe that the most sustainable solution to the situation in West Africa and the Sahel lies in comprehensive strategies that address the root causes of insecurity and instability.

**Annex VIII****Statement by the Permanent Representative of Mexico to the United Nations, Juan Ramón de la Fuente Ramírez**

[Original: Spanish]

I wish to begin by recognizing the work of the Special Representative, Mohamed Ibn Chambas, and the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) team in comprehensively addressing the causes of conflicts in West Africa and the Sahel in the context of the pandemic.

I wish also, on behalf of my country, to strongly condemn the recent violence that has resulted in civilian casualties in the Niger, Burkina Faso and Nigeria. Those acts must be investigated and punished by the competent authorities in order to deliver justice to the victims and give their families redress.

Mexico believes that the only effective way to break the cycle of violence that affects the region is to shift the socioeconomic conditions leading to inequality and exclusion. For that reason, the work being carried out by UNOWAS, in cooperation with the countries of West Africa and the Sahel, to create the conditions for sustainable peace is of the utmost importance.

The atmosphere of tension in which the electoral processes of recent months took place, particularly in Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea, as well as the events in Mali, are a reminder that much work remains to be done to consolidate State institutions in the region. All of this must be taken into account in order to strengthen the strategy of preventive diplomacy, in close coordination with the African Union and the Economic Community of West African States, in preparation for the next round of elections, particularly in Mali, where prior work on institutional reforms will be essential to achieving a peaceful transition.

The example of the successful first electoral round held in the Niger on 27 December is an example of what can be achieved when the political will of national Governments and international cooperation are mobilized towards the same goal. The peaceful transfer of power in the Niger represents a historic breakthrough for the country and an example for the entire region and the world.

However, there are concerns about the deterioration in the humanitarian situation in the region. Mexico calls on the international community to support the humanitarian plan for the Sahel and to ensure that the countries of the region have adequate access to vaccines and treatments in connection with the coronavirus disease. International cooperation in that area will contribute to dealing with the second wave of the pandemic in order to build on the positive results that the region has registered so far.

In addition to security problems, it must be recalled that the pandemic has left more than 12 million girls and boys without access to education during these months in the countries of the central Sahel alone. It is vital to mobilize all possible support for the countries affected in order to avert further setbacks in the area of education, because education is the best instrument at our disposal to stop the advance of the extremist ideologies that are spreading in some areas of West Africa and the Sahel.

Mexico takes note of the study based on climate risk assessments carried out by UNOWAS in cooperation with the country teams in the region. That is an important contribution that will make it possible to strengthen conflict-prevention efforts in the area, while taking account of the specific repercussions of climate change on the security situation in the region and vice versa. The development of

national plans for adaptation to climate change will make it possible to identify the most pressing challenges.

My country is concerned at the fact that the activities of the terrorist organizations deployed in the area continue to pose a threat to the civilian population and represents a source of instability throughout West Africa. In that regard, we commend the work being done by national and foreign forces to neutralize the threat of terrorism. However, it is appropriate to recall that this fight must take place within the framework of international obligations in the field of human rights and human rights law.

Finally, Mexico welcomes the growing participation of women in the peace processes under way, in keeping with resolution 1325 (2000). The incorporation of a gender perspective into various national legal frameworks is a step in the right direction and should be paired with concrete actions aimed at achieving greater participation by women in key positions in national Governments. We will work together with Ireland to advance that goal. Without the active participation of women from West Africa and the Sahel, it will be impossible to break the cycle of violence and move towards more just and peaceful societies.

**Annex IX****Statement by the Permanent Representative of Norway to the United Nations, Mona Juul**

I thank Special Representative Chambas for his briefing.

First, let me once again express our deepest condolences to our colleagues from the Niger and to the people of that country following the horrific killing of civilians in Tillabéri this month. The recent tragedy in Tillabéri is yet another instance where civilians, including women and children, fall victim to violence in the Sahel and Lake Chad area. That calls for a stronger protection of civilians, including the implementation of the Safe Schools Declaration. Children have the right to education without fear of attack.

We have seen that the coronavirus disease has also had a compounding influence on conflict and displacement, which is increasingly putting women and girls at risk of sexual and gender-based violence. We urge the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) to further prioritize those issues.

We condemn all attacks on civilians in the region. In order to put an end to them, local, regional and international efforts must be well coordinated, including between the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali and the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel.

Of particular gravity are the violations committed against children. We strongly condemn violations and abuses against children by any party. While it is always imperative that international humanitarian law and international human rights be fully respected and implemented, this is particularly so given the deteriorating humanitarian situation in the region. Victims' rights must be ensured, and perpetrators held accountable by credible national or international criminal justice mechanisms. Impunity must end. In this, national Governments must lead the way.

Security on land is also closely related to that at sea. We welcome the increased cooperation by UNOWAS and the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa on maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea, in line with the Council's resolutions.

Much of the work of UNOWAS is by nature discreet, but that does not make it any less important. UNOWAS diplomacy has had a great impact on the prevention, mitigation and resolution of conflicts. Its role before, during and after the many recent elections is commendable.

Special Representative Chambas's electoral missions — together with the African Union and the Economic Community of West African States — have been important in mitigating conflict, encouraging openness and discouraging hate speech. We appreciate the strategic support provided by UNOWAS to local conflict-resolution mechanisms. As we know, localized conflicts often are drivers of instability.

It is worrisome that several of the recent elections in the region were marred by exclusion, electoral violence and the deaths of civilians. We call on all stakeholders to ensure that the upcoming elections are inclusive, credible and peaceful. Elections present opportunities to renew social contracts between Governments and the people and to strengthen democratic governance and the inclusion of marginalized groups.

One important way to ensure inclusion is the full, equal and meaningful participation of women at all levels of decision-making. UNOWAS gender-sensitive reporting reveals mixed progress but also highlights positive examples of gender-inclusion efforts and legal reforms.

Let me commend the role of UNOWAS in highlighting the effects of climate change on security. Disputes over land, water and food are fertile breeding grounds for violence and terrorism. As such, it is important that considerations of the impacts of climate-related security risks be addressed by the Council. Norway supports the work of UNOWAS in this area, including through the Climate Security Mechanism. That innovative work helps regional actors and countries of the region to better understand the effects of climate on security and to develop risk-prevention and management strategies. The international community needs to support the implementation of such strategies. Regional cooperation is key to unlocking sustainable progress.

At a recent meeting of the Peacebuilding Commission, participants recognized the leadership role of UNOWAS in United Nations system cooperation and strategies in the region. We trust UNOWAS to enhance regional and subregional partnerships, while addressing the cross-border and cross-cutting threats to peace and security.

Lastly, let me end with an appeal: that we ensure that UNOWAS continues to get the adequate support and resources that its important functions dictate.

**Annex X****Statement by the Deputy Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations, Anna Evstigneeva**

[Original: Russian]

We thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for West Africa and the Sahel, Mohamed Ibn Chambas, for his briefing.

We share the concerns expressed by Mr. Chambas regarding the challenges facing many countries in West Africa, especially in the Sahel. The region is literally caught in a cycle of growing terrorist activity, inter-ethnic and intercommunal conflicts and organized crime. Throughout 2020, we received tragic reports of people killed in heinous terrorist attacks. Unfortunately, the beginning of this year was no different, with attacks by militants that killed civilians in the Niger and French troops in Mali. We extend our condolences to the peoples of those countries and express our support for all those who are engaged in the difficult fight against terrorism in the region.

The coronavirus disease pandemic is a new and extremely dangerous factor for security and stability in West Africa. It strikes all countries indiscriminately, both the strongest and the most vulnerable ones. Social services cease to function, and schools and health-care facilities are under tremendous strain. Only those who are interested in further destabilization of the region — terrorists and other disruptive elements — benefit from that situation. While it is encouraging to hear that many West African States were able to contain the pandemic, it is clear that the coronavirus disease will have a significant impact on economic development.

Political developments in the countries of the region show that, even under the constraints of the pandemic, the African States and public institutions — with few exceptions — have generally managed to cope with their tasks. We therefore hope that the parliamentary and presidential elections scheduled for the first half of 2021 in many countries of the region will be held democratically, transparently and legitimately and with full respect for national sovereignty. Interference by external actors in those processes must be prevented.

The United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) faces large-scale, difficult tasks: promoting the resolution of regional crises, engaging in political mediation, helping to strengthen State institutions, implementing the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel and coordinating other United Nations presences on the ground. The effective functioning of the Office directly depends on how well it coordinates with regional organizations, such as the African Union, the Economic Community of West African States, the Group of Five for the Sahel and the Lake Chad Basin Commission. Some issues, including combating piracy and the demarcation of the border between Nigeria and Cameroon, require close cooperation between UNOWAS and its southern neighbour — the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa.

Since the closure of the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau, UNOWAS has assumed responsibility for monitoring developments in the country. In those circumstances, we believe that it is absurd to maintain the Security Council sanctions against Guinea-Bissau, as measures under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations are envisaged only in the case of threats to international peace and security. We call for the gradual lifting of those measures.

Russia welcomes the personal commitment of Mr. Chambas and his efforts to help the countries of West Africa, the Sahel and the Lake Chad basin to overcome the current difficulties. There is no doubt that UNOWAS deserves great credit for its achievements.

---

**Annex XI****Statement by the Acting Deputy Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations, James Roscoe**

I would like to thank Special Representative Chambas for his briefing today and for his ongoing work over the past six months during the terrible security and humanitarian challenges across the region. The United Kingdom will continue to work with the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) and the countries of the region to form a well-calibrated and holistic response.

The United Kingdom also welcomes the largely peaceful elections and the strong voter turnout last year in Burkina Faso, the Niger and Ghana. We remain concerned by the violence and tension that marked some elections in the region, and we encourage all parties to continue to use dialogue to resolve their political differences. We are grateful to Special Representative of the Secretary-General Chambas for his personal, quiet diplomacy, which, while not always in the public eye, has a significant impact across the region.

With regard to the situation in Mali, the United Kingdom believes that the transition period is an opportunity not only to prepare for free and fair elections but also to make progress on key issues, such as the peace process and tackling corruption. The authorities in Mali should focus on those issues as a matter of urgency. Resuming the regular meetings of the Agreement Monitoring Committee is a positive first step, and we welcome the inclusion of women for the first time.

We remain deeply concerned by the continuing deteriorating humanitarian situation across much of the region. We are also concerned by the increasing instances of forced displacement in the central Sahel and north-eastern Nigeria. Last year, the United Kingdom provided an additional \$21 million in humanitarian funding to the Sahel, taking our funding there since 2019 to more than \$200 million. That assistance has supported more than 7 million people in the hardest-hit areas. But the assistance needs to reach those who need it, and we urge all parties to ensure unhindered humanitarian access to allow the delivery of goods and services. Without that, food insecurity and protection needs will continue to rise.

The United Kingdom is concerned by the increase in human rights violations across West Africa and the Sahel, and we call for strengthened accountability from Governments and improved compliance with international human rights standards. We are committed to supporting action on that — for example, through our contribution to training on international humanitarian law for the Malian armed forces and support for the implementation of the human rights compliance framework for the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel (G-5 Sahel).

In these meetings, as colleagues will recall, we also frequently advocate for the protection of children, educators and schools across the region and encourage all Governments to follow the Safe Schools Declaration. We welcome the release of more than 300 boys abducted in north-western Nigeria late last year. That event reinforces the importance of the Safe Schools initiative.

Finally, on climate, it is good to hear many Council members talk about the impact of climate change on security in the region, regardless of their views on the causes of climate change. The views of the United Kingdom on that issue are quite clear. We know that the climate is changing and that it is negatively impacting security, as Ambassador Kimani set out very clearly (annex VII). As the Security Council, we have a responsibility to consider the impact of climate change more fully and factor it into the United Nations system response so as to ensure that we do

what we can to prevent further risks to peace and security from the challenges posed by climate change.

With those interconnected challenges facing the region, we welcome the continued implementation of the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel and the close engagement of UNOWAS with the region and with regional bodies. As Ambassador Kimani said, we need a holistic approach, with the security efforts of the G-5, the Sahel region, Task Force Takuba and Operation Barkhane, as well as national security efforts, combined with the efforts of wider development partners to address the root causes of violence, because the region is not going to make real progress unless security gains are underpinned by quick and effective development activity. I therefore hope that Mr. Chambas can continue to champion such an approach to the region and beyond within the United Nations system.

---

**Annex XII****Statement by the Political Coordinator of the Permanent Mission of the United States of America to the United Nations, Rodney Hunter**

I thank Special Representative Chambas for his informative briefing today. He and his team were indeed very busy over the past few months.

This past autumn the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) played an integral role in supporting free and fair presidential elections in five West African nations. The coronavirus disease pandemic complicated the situation, and we extend our appreciation to Mr. Chambas and his team for their tireless support for long-term stability and security in the region. While much work needs to be done, we are seeing progress. Those five elections in West Africa occurred in a relatively calm environment and took place without serious electoral problems. We are confident that the support of UNOWAS will continue to show success during the Niger's second round of presidential elections in February.

Turning to Guinea-Bissau, I would like to thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Sori-Coulibaly for her dedication to the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNIOGBIS) and for seeing the mission through to completion. The closure of UNIOGBIS on 31 December is a sign of the country's development and political progress. However, while great strides have been made, the United Nations country team and UNOWAS must remain engaged and promote continued political stability in Guinea-Bissau. The citizens of Guinea-Bissau deserve continued progress and not to lose the gains that UNIOGBIS fostered. The international community must therefore remain vigilant. We welcome the work of regional organizations, such as the Economic Community of West African States, to foster stability in Guinea-Bissau and the wider region.

The United Nations has proved its ability to promote capacity-building and foster regional stability. Yet the scourge of terrorism continues to plague the region on a weekly, if not daily, basis. We are deeply concerned about the resulting continued instability across the Sahel. As we said before, we join our colleagues in condemning the attacks that killed 100 civilians in the Niger on 2 January. Those cowardly and heinous attacks must stop. There is no place in the modern world for violence against innocent people. To help stabilize the Sahel, regional Governments must continue to strengthen State institutions, provide good governance to their citizens and give humanitarian organizations unfettered access to reach those in need. Governments undermine their own credibility when State officials, particularly security forces, violate or abuse human rights and fail to protect their citizens. All parties must respect the humanitarian principles and international humanitarian law.

Finally, turning to Mali, the United States extends its deepest sympathies to the families of the five French soldiers from Operation Barkhane who were recently killed. Attacks against international security forces must stop. We are thankful that the 7 January attack on a base of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali resulted in no casualties. International security forces alone are not the solution to the scourge of terrorism. Stability there can come only from within the country through democratic reforms, a greater governmental presence in the north and better public services. We are encouraged that the signatory parties to the Algiers Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation on Mali recently released a revised road map to fulfil the Agreement's benchmarks. We hope that the Security Council will continue to urge the signatory parties forward on that positive trajectory and assist the transitional Government in fulfilling its stated commitment to critical reforms during the transition period.

**Annex XIII****Statement by the Deputy Permanent Representative of Viet Nam to the United Nations, Tra Phuong Nguyen**

I would like to thank Mr. Mohamed Ibn Chambas, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS), for his comprehensive briefing.

We take note of the complexity of the political situation in West Africa and the Sahel during the past few months, when elections in some countries were marred by tensions and challenges. We call on all stakeholders in those countries to work towards consensus on areas of disagreement so that the upcoming elections of 2021 can take place in an inclusive, transparent, credible and peaceful manner.

In that regard, we commend the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), UNOWAS and the United Nations teams for their efforts in proactively engaging and working with the relevant parties to maintain peace, security and stability in the region.

We also welcome the ongoing efforts to promote the participation and representation of women in the political and peace processes in several countries. We look forward to seeing women and young people play greater roles in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction in the region in 2021.

The security situation in the region continues to be fragile due to the multidimensional challenges, such as terrorism, intercommunal conflicts, organized crime and the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. Civilians and defence and security forces remain the targets of violence and deadly terrorist attacks, as was the case in the Niger and Mali recently. We would like to express our deepest condolences and solidarity to the Governments and the peoples of the Niger and France for those tragedies. We strongly condemn such barbaric acts. The perpetrators must be brought to justice.

Against that backdrop, we urge all the parties concerned to increase their cooperation in the fight against terrorism and violent extremism across West Africa and the Sahel. It is important that UNOWAS, the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali, ECOWAS and the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel (G-5 Sahel) meet regularly and conduct joint trend assessments of the regional dimension of the crisis and cross-border dynamics, in addition to sharing intelligence information on that matter.

The dire humanitarian situation in the region remains one of our key concerns. Millions of people, especially in Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and the Niger, are suffering from food insecurity, displacement and the adverse impacts of climate change. More than 13.4 million in the region, including 7 million children, are in urgent need of life-saving assistance and protection. At least 3,500 schools were closed, and more than 150 health centres have been unable to function fully and properly.

Therefore, we call on all parties to uphold their obligations under international humanitarian law and ensure the legitimate rights and interests of the people in the region. We emphasize the importance of ensuring that humanitarian aid be provided without hindrance to those who need it most, especially children, the elderly, women and other vulnerable groups. We also call for greater financial contributions from international donors so that the humanitarian aid programmes can be implemented fully and effectively in 2021.

We also reaffirm our support for the Secretary-General's global ceasefire appeal to fight the pandemic and for the implementation of resolution 2532 (2020). Equally important, equitable access to the COVID-19 vaccines should be facilitated in the countries of the region.

Last but not least, we echo the Secretary-General's call on the States members of ECOWAS and international partners to fully support coherent and integrated approaches, including through the implementation of the stabilization strategy for countries affected by the Boko Haram crisis, the G-5 Sahel priority investment plan and the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel and its Support Plan. It is also important to integrate current and projected climate-related threats into all conflict-prevention efforts.

---