



# Security Council

Seventy-sixth year

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New York

*Provisional*

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<i>President:</i>	Mr. De Rivière . . . . .	(France)
<i>Members:</i>	China . . . . .	Mr. Dai Bing
	Estonia . . . . .	Mr. Jürgenson
	India . . . . .	Mr. Raguttahalli
	Ireland . . . . .	Ms. Byrne Nason
	Kenya . . . . .	Mr. Kimani
	Mexico . . . . .	Mrs. Buenrostro Massieu
	Niger . . . . .	Mr. Abarry
	Norway . . . . .	Ms. Juul
	Russian Federation . . . . .	Mr. Polyanskiy
	Saint Vincent and the Grenadines . . . . .	Ms. DeShong
	Tunisia . . . . .	Mr. Ladeb
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Mr. Roscoe
	United States of America . . . . .	Mr. Mills
	Viet Nam . . . . .	Mrs. Nguyen

## Agenda

### Peace consolidation in West Africa

Report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (S/2021/612)

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*The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.*

### **Adoption of the agenda**

*The agenda was adopted.*

### **Peace consolidation in West Africa**

#### **Report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (S/2021/612)**

**The President** (*spoke in French*): In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mr. Khatir Mahamat Saleh Annadif, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel; and Ms. Chantal Ayemou, President of the Réseau Ivoirien pour la Défense des Droits de l'Enfant et de la Femme.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2021/612, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel.

I now give the floor to Mr. Annadif.

**Mr. Annadif** (*spoke in French*): It is an honour and a pleasure for me to be here before the Council today to present the latest report of the Secretary-General (S/2021/612), on the activities of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS), whose activities I have been leading for almost two months.

The report is structured around the main challenges facing the countries of the subregion, in particular security challenges, challenges related to electoral processes, challenges linked to the representation of women and young people in decision-making bodies, and challenges linked to climate change.

As soon as I took office, I undertook a regional tour during which I have been able to meet with most of the Heads of State of country members of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). That tour, which I am about to conclude, allowed me to collect their candid opinions and suggestions on how we should work together to contribute to peace and development in the subregion.

Throughout these visits, I also met a range of national interlocutors, as well as international partners and United Nations country teams, to discuss the same challenges. All interlocutors reaffirmed their continued commitment to working closely with UNOWAS, which is ready to coordinate its activities with regional and subregional organizations, in particular the African Union, ECOWAS, the Group of Five for the Sahel and the Gulf of Guinea Commission.

The security challenges created by terrorist acts in the Liptako-Gourma region and the Lake Chad basin, as well as by crime along the coasts of the Gulf of Guinea, must be addressed from a regional perspective because the risks of a confluence between the threat coming from the sea and that coming from the Sahel are real, and the main victims are the civilian populations. The Accra initiative, which brings together Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Togo, is a laudable example of anticipation of the regional approach.

In addition, there has been a marked improvement in the coordination between the ECOWAS action plan, the regional stabilization strategy for the Lake Chad basin and the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel, in order to consolidate this comprehensive approach and long-term stabilization.

The challenges linked to the electoral processes are mainly the consequence of a lack of political dialogue and above all the lack of consensus on the fundamental principles of the various elections.

In this regard, and in coordination with the ECOWAS Commission, UNOWAS is striving to improve exchanges between ministers of justice, judicial cooperation and the sharing of experiences among the main actors responsible for promoting the rule of law in the region, in accordance with the ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance. In this regard, the prospects for the forthcoming elections in Cabo Verde and in The Gambia are looking more auspicious.

With regard to the issue of women, we note with satisfaction the positive dynamics under way with regard to the representation of women and young people in decision-making bodies, and hope that these efforts will continue. In this regard, progress in national legislation, such as laws on quotas or on parity, is encouraging.

*(spoke in English)*

The United Nations system is fully mobilized to ensure that development aid efficiently reaches the people of the Sahel through inclusive, sustainable and people-centred responses. We have increased the empowerment of women and girls and the promotion of gender equality, notably through the recently established Group of Friends of Women in the Sahel. We have also transformed our approach to engaging with young people as agents of change and transformation, and not only as beneficiaries.

In the face of persistent farmer-herder conflicts across the region, UNOWAS continues to co-chair a United Nations regional working group on farmer-herder issues and conflict prevention. As follow-up to the decision of the executive committee of the Secretary-General on farmer-herder dynamics in West Africa and Central Africa, UNOWAS is collaborating with the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa and the Special Coordinator for Development in the Sahel, my brother Abdoulaye Mar Diye, to identify priority areas for scaled-up United Nations action this year.

Considering the importance and urgency of addressing climate insecurity, UNOWAS, together with some United Nations agencies, launched a United Nations regional working group on climate change, security, environment and development. With the objective to promote United Nations synergy and a harmonized approach to working with ECOWAS, the working group will contribute to linkage of local efforts with national and regional policy development.

*(spoke in French)*

On another topic, we note that on the whole, West Africa and the Sahel have resisted the coronavirus disease pandemic rather well, thanks to concerted efforts at the national and regional levels.

The United Nations and bilateral and multilateral partners must continue to encourage and support countries and not relax their efforts, as the pandemic continues to affect the security and socioeconomic situation of populations.

In conclusion, I would like to commend the constant support of the members of the Security Council for the implementation of the UNOWAS mandate, as well as to reiterate our commitment to continuing to support national and regional actors in strengthening peace and stability in West Africa and the Sahel.

**The President** *(spoke in French)*: I thank Mr. Annadif for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Ayemou.

**Ms. Ayemou** *(spoke in French)*: I thank the Security Council for giving civil society this opportunity to discuss with members the situation concerning the rights of women and children in Côte d'Ivoire and West Africa in the context of the Equality Generations campaign.

I am Chantal Ayemou, President of the Ivorian Network for the Protection of Children's and Women's Rights. My statement will set out the major advances made since the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing, priority challenges in realizing the rights of girls and women in Côte d'Ivoire and West Africa, as well as some recommendations for the Council's consideration.

Major advances have been made by the Ivorian Government and several West African countries since the Beijing Conference, mainly on the legal and institutional framework. Among other things, that includes the adoption of the law punishing female genital mutilation; security reforms that made it possible to open up the military technical preparatory school and the gendarmerie to young girls; the establishment of the National Equity and Gender Observatory; the adoption of the compulsory school act to guarantee access to school for all children aged 6 to 16; and the adoption in Côte d'Ivoire of the law on the political participation of women in assemblies, requiring 30 per cent representation for women on electoral lists.

Despite those favourable steps on gender equality in several countries of the region, inequalities persist. In 2020, Côte d'Ivoire ranked 153 out of 162 countries on the United Nations Development Programme Gender Inequality Index. The following challenges persist in most West African countries.

With regard to school access and academic retention and completion for girls, only 39.42 per cent of girls in primary school reach secondary school.

Maternity-related mortality stands at 239 deaths per 100,000 births, as compared to 12 deaths per 100,000 births in developed countries.

Access to land ownership for women remains marginal; women in West Africa are less likely than men to own land. Out of 1,730 land certificates issued

in Côte d'Ivoire in March 2016, only 159 were awarded to women.

Although proscribed by law, female genital mutilation and forced and early marriages persist.

About 60 per cent of women are victims of domestic violence. When it comes to physical, moral and sexual violence against girls and women domestic workers, 22 per cent are minors aged 10 to 17.

On women's low representation in political and decision-making spheres, out of 255 members of Parliament in Côte d'Ivoire, only 11.37 per cent are women.

Like several countries in West Africa and the Sahel, Côte d'Ivoire faces security challenges in the northern border areas, which impact agricultural activity, mainly run by women.

Faced with that scenario, I would like to propose the following recommendations for the Council's consideration.

In order to ensure girls' right to education, holistic support programmes should be put in place for girls to be able to attend, stay in and complete school.

To combat women's precarious health status and maternity-related mortality, a multisectoral approach should be adopted in resolving women's health issues, including by addressing the root causes of the main health problems affecting women and by facilitating access to care services specific to women. As well, we should rethink the financing of health systems in order to ensure quality care for women during pregnancy, childbirth and the post-partum period.

To improve access to land ownership for women, we recommend guaranteeing legal remedies for women through better access to information and strengthened legal support.

To combat gender-based violence, a specific law should be adopted to punish violence against women, including domestic violence, as well as a specific law to punish as a crime the perpetrators and sponsors of early and forced marriages. We call on West African countries to ratify the relevant international conventions, including those of the International Labour Organization.

To improve women's representation in decision-making bodies, State institutions should be

strengthened to promote female leadership in politics. As well, women's political representation should be increased through specific laws.

Finally, for the safety of women in the face of the effects of climate change, climate policies and programmes in West Africa should be made gender-sensitive. We should go beyond women's numerical representation in climate policy processes and create dynamic mechanisms for taking initiatives and influencing decisions.

**The President** (*spoke in French*): I thank Ms. Ayemou for her briefing.

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements.

**Mr. Abarry** (Niger) (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the three African members of the Security Council — Kenya, the Niger and Tunisia — as well as Saint Vincent and the Grenadines (A3+1), I would like to warmly welcome Mr. Mahamat Saleh Annadif in his new role as Special Representative of the Secretary General for West Africa and the Sahel. I also thank him for his excellent briefing. We also followed with close attention the briefing by Ms. Chantal Ayemou, President of the Ivorian Network for the Protection of Children's and Women's Rights.

We reiterate our support for the stabilization and good offices efforts that the Special Representative of the Secretary-General continues to deploy in the subregion, with respect for national sovereignty and the primary responsibility of States for peace and security.

We also welcome that a regional approach has been adopted on the issue of the link between climate and security, in particular through the launching of the regional working group on climate change, the environment, security and development in West Africa. We believe that will help promote integrated and harmonized solutions to climate-change risks. This topic, which is gaining more and more support, is followed with great commitment by the Niger and Ireland, which we sincerely thank.

At the start of the second half of 2021, we would like to make the following key observations on the report under consideration (S/2021/612).

In terms of security, we must welcome the outstanding progress made in the ongoing operationalization of the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel (G-5

Sahel), which has also been reinforced by a mechanism for monitoring and analysing civil incidents. It is important that predictable and durable support be given to the Joint Force so that it can continue to effectively fulfil its mandate, which is essential to maintaining peace and security in the region — a global public good.

Despite national, regional and international efforts to date to combat terrorism, it is regrettable to see a deterioration in the security situation in region. Likewise, the security situation, combined with the impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID19) pandemic, exposes the countries of the region to a particularly difficult socioeconomic situation. For the A3+1, it is therefore necessary to assess the needs in order to respond to the various threats; likewise it is necessary to rationalize and harmonize strategies, both in terms of security and development. The support of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) is crucial in that regard.

It is equally necessary to strengthen regional and subregional partnerships to address cross-border and cross-cutting threats to peace and security. In the same vein, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) action plan for the eradication of terrorism for the period 2020 to 2024 should be further supported in terms of funding.

With regard to the phenomenon of drug trafficking, it must be recognized from the outset that the West African region is neither a producer nor a consumer of these drugs. It is simply a victim of its fragile security and border control, which makes it a transit zone. Therefore, as long as the regions of origin and final destination do not properly assume their responsibilities to prevent production and find a sustainable solution to the growing consumption of drugs, the efforts of the United Nations and the countries of West Africa will be wasted. In this regard, we welcome the significant efforts of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime in strengthening the capacities of national and subregional structures in charge of preventing and combating these illicit activities.

On the humanitarian front, the effects of COVID-19 and food insecurity, high levels of displacement and the adverse effects of climate change, which have increased at an alarming rate, call for urgent solidarity actions for the region. However, while vaccines have gradually begun to reach the region, the slow pace and limited quantities received, as well as the reluctance of

some populations to receive the vaccine, are of great concern. We would like to stress that timely delivery of the vaccine is urgently needed, and we must ensure that fair and equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines remains a priority. In addition, the A3+1 stresses the need to increase contributions to the humanitarian response plans for the Sahel, which, as of mid-June, had received only 16 per cent of the \$2.7 billion needed for its implementation.

Gender mainstreaming in the work of UNOWAS and efforts to increase the full participation of women in political and security processes are crucial and should be further encouraged. We also believe that better coordination and accelerated implementation of the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel and the United Nations Support Plan for the Sahel should be ensured, as well as harmonization of actions with the Group of Five for the Sahel Priority Investment Programme.

With regard to the issue of internally displaced persons and refugees, which is another challenge facing the region, we welcome in particular the efforts of the authorities of the Niger to create suitable and sustainable conditions for their effective return to their homes in the east of the country by December 2021, using their own funds.

In conclusion, the A3+1 welcomes the democratic progress made in the region following the recent elections. The successes achieved are the result of the promotion of political dialogue and consensus-building among political actors on national priorities, which is essential for a sustainable peaceful coexistence among the different national communities. In the same vein, the A3+1 has welcomed the support provided by the African Union to the region and appreciated the very positive role played by ECOWAS in mediation, particularly in Mali and other countries in the region, as well as its significant efforts in promoting the rule of law and good governance in West Africa.

The Niger looks forward to preparing, with Ireland as co-penholder, a presidential statement on the situation in the West African region.

**Ms. Byrne Nason** (Ireland) (*spoke in French*): I would also like to thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Annadif for his briefing. We are grateful for the essential role played by the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) in conflict prevention in the region. I would

like to welcome Ms. Chantal Ayemou, President of the Ivorian Network for the Protection of Children's and Women's Rights, to the Security Council. It is crucial that the voice of civil society, especially women-led civil society in the region, be heard. I thank her very much.

Democratic governance is crucial for long-term peace and stability in West Africa and the Sahel. We welcome the recent democratic transitions in the Niger and the sustained reconciliation efforts in Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire and Togo. At the same time, we are concerned about the current trend of reversal of democratic values in the region, in particular the recent events in Mali.

Reports of widespread impunity for human rights violations in relation to electoral processes are extremely worrying. More than ever, the "good offices" function of UNOWAS is crucial.

Strengthening the essential social contract between the State and its citizens is key to restoring confidence in democratic governance. This can be achieved through the promotion of inclusive policies, the encouragement of a vibrant civil society, and, of course, through freedom of expression.

*(spoke in English)*

Engaging youth and providing access to quality education, particularly for girls, are both critical. We condemn the persistent attacks on schools, in particular continued abductions in Nigeria, as we disturbingly witnessed yet again this week. Schools must be safeguarded throughout the region.

Without women's participation, long-term stability cannot be achieved. It is simple: women must be supported, encouraged and protected in all political processes. We welcome the increased political representation of women in the region, but their absence from Cabinet tables must be addressed.

It is particularly promising to see UNOWAS support for women and peace and security. National action plans have been adopted by all but one country in the region, which is truly impressive at a regional level.

Ireland condemns the shocking violence we have witnessed in attacks against civilians, particularly in the Niger and Burkina Faso. Increased insecurity, the exploitation by armed groups of intercommunal tensions, and, particularly, an increase in attacks in

West African coastal States, notably northern Côte d'Ivoire, are particularly worrisome.

It is clear that climate change is one of the drivers of conflict across the region. The Informal Expert Group on Climate and Security has learned much from the work of UNOWAS on climate-risk assessments, and I commend efforts to deepen the mission's integration of climate-related security risks into its actions.

The deteriorating humanitarian situation, particularly rising food insecurity in the Central Sahel and the Lake Chad basin, is of deep concern. There is an urgent need for a scaled-up response and assistance to address this issue. We are alarmed by credible reports of human rights violations and attacks against humanitarian workers. Accountability must be ensured for all violations of international humanitarian and human rights law. It is also clear that the humanitarian and socioeconomic consequences of the coronavirus disease pandemic continue to exacerbate the already challenging situation in the region.

Finally, we are convinced that a coordinated regional response is critical to addressing regional peace and security in West Africa and the Sahel. Piracy in the Gulf of Guinea is another key challenge that shows no respect for national borders and requires a regional institutional response. UNOWAS continues to play a vital role in promoting regional and subregional cooperation. In particular, we commend the ongoing partnership with the African Union, the Economic Community of West African States, the Group of Five for the Sahel and the United Nations Special Coordinator for development in the Sahel.

West Africa and the Sahel holds vast potential for inclusive transformative growth due to its geographical, economic and demographic prospects. We call on all our regional partners to focus on their political commitment to democratic governance, human rights and regional cooperation in seeking lasting peace, security and prosperity in the region.

**Mr. Polyanskiy** (Russian Federation) *(spoke in Russian)*: We thank Mr. Mahamat Saleh Annadif, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for West Africa and the Sahel, and Ms. Chantal Ayemou, President of the Ivorian Network for the Protection of Children's and Women's Rights, for their briefings.

We share the concerns over dangerous challenges that many countries in West Africa, and particularly

the Sahel, are facing. In this region, terrorist activity continues to run rampant.

Over the first half of 2021, we received tragic reports of the deaths of individuals as a result of bloody terrorist attacks. We express our support to all of those who are waging the difficult struggle against terrorism in the region. Because of security problems and the coronavirus disease pandemic, many social institutions, schools and medical centres were not able to open. Although the States of West Africa have been able for the time being to hold back the spread of the pandemic, it is clear that its consequences for economic development will not go unnoticed.

Despite the myriad difficulties faced by many States in the region, they have nevertheless managed to successfully go through the election cycle. We trust that the elections planned for the second half of 2021 in a number of countries in the region will also take place in conditions of democracy, transparency, legitimacy and law and order, with strict respect for national sovereignty. There must be no interference in those processes by outside players.

In the context of the situation, in Mali we expect that all the obligations previously taken up concerning the transitional period, including the conduct of a constitutional referendum and general democratic elections according to the pre-established timeline, will be observed.

The United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) faces vast and difficult challenges: supporting the resolution of regional crises, participating in political mediation, providing assistance in the strengthening of State institutions and implementing the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel, as well as playing a coordinating role for other United Nations presences on the ground. The effectiveness of the Office's efforts directly depends on how well it is able to work with other regional organizations. Such as the African Union, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Group of Five for the Sahel and the Lake Chad Basin Commission.

We trust that in its work UNOWAS will take into account the important decisions concerning economic development and security in the region adopted at the ECOWAS summit held in Accra on 19 June. On some issues, including the fight against piracy and the demarcation of the Cameroon-Nigerian border, the requirement of UNOWAS's cooperation with its

southern brother, the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa, is evident.

After the closing of the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau, in 2020, the monitoring of events in that country fell under the purview of UNOWAS. In those conditions, we believe that preserving Security Council sanctions against Guinea-Bissau, in other words, measures under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations, which are provided for only in the case of threats to international peace and security, is absurd. We call for the steady dismantling of those sanctions.

Russia welcomes Mr. Annadif's commitment and efforts aimed at helping the countries of West Africa, the Sahel and the Lake Chad Basin overcome the current difficulties. We have no doubt that the results of UNOWAS's work will deserve the highest appraisal.

**Mr. Mills** (United States of America): I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Annadif for his briefing. It is a pleasure to welcome him back to the Security Council in his new role as Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS). I also thank Ms. Ayemou for her remarks and particularly for her recommendations to us on how to empower women across West Africa. They are useful and helpful, and my delegation takes serious note of them.

To start, the United States Government applauds the recent partnership between UNOWAS and others to launch a regional working group that addresses the critical issues of climate change, environment, security and development in West Africa. Those are key issues for the region, and we support so many important groups coming together to take them on.

Today I should like to talk about three areas of focus for UNOWAS: strengthening democracy, stopping terrorism and supporting community-led solutions to violence.

First, my delegation wants to recognize the hard work that UNOWAS has done to support elections and transitional Governments in the Sahel region. This year, despite political instability and violent protests, the Niger had its first-ever successful transfer of power between Presidents, and that is a remarkable achievement. The Constitutional Court's confirmation of President Bazoum's victory highlighted how strong

institutional mechanisms really are key to healthy democracies. We welcome President Bazoum's commitment to addressing security threats in the region, and we celebrate his promise to prioritize women's inclusion and women's mobility.

In Mali, unfortunately, we are seeing the opposite trend. The United States stands with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the international community in calling for Mali's return to constitutional rule through democratic elections in February 2022. We condemn the detention of former officials of Mali's transitional Government, and we join the world in calling for the immediate, unconditional release of those still detained and under house arrest. Their continued detention is a direct assault on the country's ongoing transition to the return of democracy.

Secondly, terrorist groups continue to perpetrate far too much violence against civilians and United Nations peacekeepers across the Sahel. We support all efforts to counter violent extremist groups. We need to protect civilians during armed conflict, and we need to boost confidence in regional security forces and the governing authorities. We also condemn the recent attacks in Burkina Faso that killed 138 people, many of them children. We particularly condemn the use of child soldiers.

Thirdly and finally, given that intercommunal violence, we deeply value the efforts of ECOWAS and UNOWAS to promote long-term security and stability across the Sahel. We strongly support and welcome community-led projects to address those concerns. After all, the communities affected by that violence are best positioned to know how to stop it. That means soliciting input from individuals and including civil-society organizations in the process.

We therefore support UNOWAS and the Governments in West Africa and the Sahel working together, in partnership, to develop a civilian-led joint project to address local conflicts. That project will be critical, and, hopefully, it will help lead to long-term peace, prosperity and security in the region.

**Mr. Roscoe** (United Kingdom): I, too, should like to join others in welcoming Special Representative Annadif back to the Chamber today, thank him for his briefing and welcome him to his new role. We are very grateful to him for the dynamic start that he has made in the job since he began. The work that he has done on his regional tour to meet Heads of State across the

region is such a critical part of the role. I thank him for that energy.

I should also like to thank Ms. Ayemou for her commitments and all that she is doing in the fight for women's rights and for the children across her country. The prognosis that she gave is one that we agree with entirely, and, as my United States colleague just said, we will do all we can to support her and all like her in championing those causes.

It is clear from Mr. Annadif's briefing that security, particularly in the Sahel, continues to be the dominant regional concern. We encourage Mr. Annadif's Office to focus on the steps that the United Nations can take in a coordinated fashion to address the underlying drivers of conflict and the work that Mr. Annadif personally can undertake to encourage leaders across the region to make the right choices. I was also very pleased to hear about the regional working group that he set up to address the impact of climate change on the security situation in the region. I think that it is such a critical area for the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) to be involved in.

We also note the references in the report (S/2021/612) to insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea and the risk that Mr. Annadif identified just now: that that threat could be conflated with the land-based security risks. The United Kingdom is committed to improving maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea by supporting regional African partners to find regionally led solutions, and we are delivering support to the Gulf of Guinea through the Group of Seven (G7) ++ Group of Friends of the Gulf of Guinea, which the United Kingdom is co-chairing with Senegal this year.

We also want to focus on the humanitarian situation, which Mr. Annadif mentioned and as raised in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2021/612), because the situation is clearly incredibly concerning across the region. We are doing what we can; at the Group of Seven Summit in May, the United Kingdom brokered an action plan to help save millions of lives from famine and humanitarian crises. That included an initial pledge of £267 million in assistance for communities in north-east Nigeria. We are particularly concerned about the food security situation for those whom humanitarian access is unable to reach. We hope that Mr. Annadif can again use his role to work with all parties to conflicts to ensure safe and unimpeded access for humanitarian actors.

Turning to elections, the United Kingdom welcomes the largely peaceful elections in Côte d'Ivoire, the Niger and Cabo Verde earlier this year. We are pleased to see that preparations are under way for elections that will take place later in the year, including in the Gambia and Cabo Verde. However, we share Mr. Annadif's concerns about the violence and tensions that marked the election periods in Benin and Guinea. Once again, we think that is an area in which Mr. Annadif can add particular value by encouraging all parties to continue to use dialogue to resolve their political differences and to continue to call for free and fair elections that allow all parties to participate. Again, we believe that Mr. Annadif's role as an elder statesman in the region will help States to think ahead on elections to ensure independent preparations that lead to credible outcomes.

On human rights, and on gender in particular, we are concerned by the level of impunity for human rights violations and abuses across West Africa and the Sahel. We call on Mr. Annadif and UNOWAS once again to call for strengthened accountability from Governments and improved compliance with international human rights standards. We are also grateful to him for the emphasis he has placed on women and the role of women in political processes, and in politics more generally, as well as the emphasis he has placed on young people and their involvement. We know from listening to Ms. Ayemou's briefing how critical that is to progress.

In conclusion, there are four areas that we believe require Mr. Annadif's continued focus, namely, defining what States and the United Nations can do in a coordinated manner to address insecurity; pressing States and parties to conflict to allow humanitarian access; working with States to prepare for elections that are independent and credible; and, finally, acting as a champion for human rights and an equal role for women across the region.

**Mrs. Nguyen** (Viet Nam): At the outset, I would like to welcome Mr. Khatir Mahamat Saleh Annadif to his first briefing at the Security Council. I thank him for his comprehensive briefing and welcome Ms. Chantal Ayemou to our meeting today.

There have been some positive developments in the political situation in West Africa and the Sahel since we last met in January (see S/2021/43). As stated in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2021/612), the region has witnessed the formation of new Governments and Parliaments in several countries. Those signs of

reconciliation are greatly encouraging. However, there has been election-related violence in association with that process. Other corners of the region have also encountered certain challenges that have hindered election processes.

We therefore call on all stakeholders in those countries to continue dialogue and consultation so that consensus can replace differences on outstanding issues, including the transition in Mali. We support the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel and the United Nations country teams for their efforts in proactively engaging and working with the parties concerned to maintain peace and security and stability in the region. We emphasize the need to increase the meaningful participation of women in that process.

We share the assessment of the Secretary-General on the security situation in the region. Many countries have faced tremendous challenges, including high levels of violence, increasing terrorism, intercommunal conflicts, organized crime, trafficking, the coronavirus disease pandemic and the threat from the sea, as mentioned by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General.

It is distressing to learn about the increase in casualties, especially among civilians and peacekeepers, due to violence and deadly terrorist attacks. We strongly condemn those acts. Those responsible for such crimes must be brought to justice. Against that backdrop, it is crucial for all countries of the region to redouble their efforts in combating terrorism and violence. In that connection, we reiterate our call for adequate support and resources for the region, especially the Group of Five for the Sahel Joint Force, in order to address the challenges I mentioned. It is crucial to increase protection for, and ensure the safety of, peacekeepers and personnel of United Nations missions in the region.

We are gravely concerned about the dire humanitarian situation in the region, especially in parts of the Central Sahel and Nigeria. According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, more than 29 million people are in need of assistance and protection in 2021. Under those circumstances, we reiterate our call for additional funding for humanitarian operations in West Africa and the Sahel. We also urge the parties concerned to remove barriers to humanitarian access and facilitate

the delivery of emergency assistance to populations in need. In addition, we stress the need to comply with international humanitarian law and ensure the legitimate rights and interests of the people in the region.

Last but not least, we reiterate our support for the Secretary-General's call to the ECOWAS member States and international partners to support holistic and integrated approaches, including through the implementation of the regional stabilization strategy, the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel and the United Nations Support Plan for the Sahel. It is also important to integrate current and projected climate-related threats into all conflict prevention efforts.

**Mrs. Buenrostro Massieu** (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Khatir Mahamat Saleh Annadif, for his briefing and wish him every success in his new role as Head of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS). I also welcome the presence of Ms. Chantal Ayemou, who reminds us of the fundamental role played by women in responding to the challenges facing West Africa and the Sahel.

As we heard, the region unfortunately continues to suffer from the consequences of political instability and inequality; the activity of terrorist organizations, mainly in the Lake Chad basin and the Sahel; intercommunal conflict; organized crime; and the effects of climate change and the pandemic. At this difficult juncture, I wish to highlight three issues.

First, Mexico believes that the combined result of the challenges facing the region are having an inordinate impact on the civilian population. My country is concerned by the increasingly fatal attacks that have occurred in recent months, such as those in Burkina Faso and the Niger, to name but a few. Of equal concern are the increasing clashes between terrorist groups and the number of child abductions. Violence continues to be the main reason that more than 29 million people are currently in need of humanitarian aid in the region, as well as why many others have been forced to leave their homes. In the light of that alarming scenario, the protection of the civilian population must be an absolute priority for the States of the region and for the international forces present in the area. That includes the protection of civilian infrastructure, in particular schools and hospitals.

Secondly, the fight against terrorism in the region must be conducted with full respect for human rights and international humanitarian law. My country deplores human rights violations perpetrated by national and international actors. Such violations are inconsistent with international law, create new grievances among the communities affected and delegitimize institutions. That is why we must investigate and duly punish them.

Thirdly, Mexico is of the view that comprehensive strategies must be adopted to resolve the structural socioeconomic issues that fuel violent extremism. We believe that sustainable development and access to basic services, such as education and health in West Africa and the Sahel, must be a central part of measures to strengthen and deploy State institutions. We firmly believe that education is the main tool for combating the radicalization of young people and the basis for greater social mobility among future generations.

Health services are also crucial, especially in an environment in which the coronavirus disease has joined the ranks of other diseases with a disproportionate effect on the most vulnerable and that deepen inequalities that foster vicious circles. For those reasons, Mexico believes that we must prioritize measures to reopen the more than 5,000 schools and numerous medical facilities that were closed due to violence or the pandemic. We also call for the resources of the international community, generally used to meet the basic needs of the population, to be increased in order to ensure a better balance in resources earmarked for security cooperation.

Lastly, we reiterate our support for the work of UNOWAS in responding to the three challenges I mentioned through its implementation of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel. Coordination with other regional organizations, in particular the Economic Community of West African States, is key to addressing security challenges, improving governance and building resilience in West Africa and the Sahel.

**Mr. Ragutthalli** (India): Let me begin by thanking Special Representative of the Secretary-General Annadif for his briefing. I also thank civil society representative Ms. Ayemou for her insights.

The United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel is a political mission with a mandate for preventive diplomacy, political mediation and facilitation efforts. It is important for the mission to remain focused on its mandate and work with national Governments and

regional organizations, particularly the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and assist them in their efforts to address the challenges faced by the region. I will focus my comments today on political, security and humanitarian developments in the region.

West Africa and the Sahel, as illustrated in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2021/612), have made notable progress on the path towards democracy and good governance. The reporting period has witnessed elections in Benin, Cabo Verde, Côte d'Ivoire and the Niger. Those elections were held in a peaceful environment, despite security-related challenges. The new Governments have assumed charge in those countries and in Ghana, which is a model of democracy for the region. In the Niger, the democratic transfer of power through elections was unprecedented. In Benin, peaceful elections have taken place with the increasing participation of its citizens in the election process. The leadership in those countries has risen to meet the hopes and expectations of the people. We extend our felicitations to the elected leaders and their peoples.

The countries of the region have also made significant progress towards reconciliation, constitutional reforms and enhancing the participation of women in governance structures. The political environment in West Africa is more vibrant and inclusive than ever before. Those who highlight the negative aspects of developments need to keep in mind that until not so long ago, the Council dealt with several country-specific agenda items. That is not the case today. We believe that these positive developments deserve the unequivocal appreciation of the Council, although there may be a few aberrations to the trend. With more elections scheduled in the coming months, the countries in the region require the continued support of bilateral partners and the international community.

On the security front, the situation in the region remains stable, except in the countries of the Group of Five for the Sahel (G-5 Sahel) and Lake Chad basin. Terrorist attacks in Burkina Faso, particularly in regions bordering Mali and the Niger, have continued unabated. Terrorism, drug trafficking and organized crime have also increased. Those developments underscore the urgent need to further intensify efforts to combat terrorism, which spills over into other countries and regions. The political instability and volatile security situation in Mali is a cause for concern. All stakeholders in Mali should renew their commitment

to the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali and its implementation, and assume ownership of the transition road map. The support and assistance of bilateral and international partners to Mali, including the United Nations, the African Union and the ECOWAS, is critical during these difficult times. We echo the call of the Secretary-General to ensure predictable and sustainable funding to the Joint Force of the G-5 Sahel. We also extend our appreciation to the work of the Multinational Joint Task Force, which plays an instrumental role in counter-insurgency operations.

On the piracy front, it is matter of concern that the Gulf of Guinea remains a piracy hotspot, with as many as 17 incidents having occurred over 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.

The Secretary-General's report mentions that 29 million people in the Sahel are in need of humanitarian assistance this year. The coronavirus disease pandemic has also increased the vulnerability of the population. Moreover, several countries in the region are among the youngest countries in the world. Due to poverty and unemployment, many of them fall victim to drug trafficking, leading, in turn, to a further increase in criminality, kidnappings and banditry. It is unfortunate that the humanitarian situation in the region does not receive the requisite attention of the international community. There is an urgent need to scale up assistance, including by increasingly utilizing African capacities, products and services.

Lastly, India attaches high importance to its relations with West Africa. India has opened five new diplomatic missions in the region in the past year and a half and is in the process of opening another four by the end of the year. To date, India has provided soft loans, amounting to \$3.3 billion, for projects in West Africa in sectors such as agriculture, irrigation, water supply, energy, solar and health. Under the ambit of the India-United Nations Development Partnership Fund, we are also providing \$9 million for livelihood projects in nine West African countries. India also has a robust security partnership with countries in the region. We have also commenced counter-terrorism training in the region. Under our Defence Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation training programme, we currently provide approximately 250 training slots to countries in the region. We remain committed to supporting countries

in West Africa through capacity-building and the strengthening of democratic institutions.

**Mr. Jürgenson** (Estonia): I would like to thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Annadif for his briefing on the most recent developments in West Africa and the Sahel. I would also like to thank Ms. Ayemou for her briefing and for highlighting the important aspects of the rights of women and children in the region.

At the outset, allow me to express Estonia's full support for the work and good offices of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel, which has remained very active during the reporting period. We would also like to commend the Economic Community of West African States for its active engagement and role in facilitating dialogue with various national stakeholders.

The past year and a half has been especially significant in the democratic processes in West Africa and the Sahel due to the number of elections held in several of the region's States. While a number of those elections were held in a relatively peaceful environment, we remain concerned about the reportedly growing perception in the region of a shrinking political and civic space. The sense among the population of a democratic reversal should be treated as an important early-warning sign that needs to be addressed immediately. While the coronavirus disease pandemic negatively affects the overall functioning of a society, it must not be used as a pretext to curtail civil liberties.

In connection with the democratic processes, I would like to also stress the importance of the full, equal and meaningful participation of women in all aspects of the political processes. While the strengthening of the normative framework on women's inclusion is positive, the reality in terms of women's representation in the national Governments and Parliaments remains clearly inadequate. Concrete steps are required from the States of the region in order to create opportunities and a safe space for women to participate in the political processes as voters and candidates, as well as civil society representatives.

Estonia remains alarmed by the deteriorating security situation in West Africa and the Sahel region. We are encouraged by some success in the regional counter-terrorist efforts. We welcome the strengthening of the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel and commend the States of the region

on operating through joint operations, as well as the Multinational Joint Task Force. However, the overall situation remains extremely concerning, with mostly the civilian population suffering from the ongoing violence. It is essential that the States of the region continue enhancing cooperation among themselves and with the international community. Estonia, for its part, will continue contributing through various international efforts.

Nevertheless, a security-centred approach alone will not suffice in bringing lasting peace and stability to West Africa and the Sahel region. It is crucial to address the root causes of conflict, take into account the underlying grievances in the society and ensure access to basic social services. In that connection it is very concerning that a significant amount of schools across the Sahel region remain closed or non-operational. Ensuring children's right to education and protecting and empowering those most vulnerable in the society is one of the key factors to the long-term stability of the society.

Respect for human rights and the fight against impunity are essential elements in achieving long-term stability in the society. Accountability for human rights abuses and violations of international humanitarian law is essential in restoring the trust of the people and supporting the reconciliation process.

**Ms. Juul** (Norway): We welcome Special Representative of the Secretary-General Annadif back in his new capacity, assure him of Norway's full support and thank him for his valuable briefing today. We also welcome the insights shared by Ms. Ayemou. Women's rights to full, equal and meaningful participation and leadership are essential in all aspects and phases of peace and political processes. This is a fundamental basis for achieving and sustaining peace.

Let me first take a moment to recognize a positive development since we last met to discuss the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS). In April, the Niger celebrated its first transfer of power from one democratically elected President to another. We congratulate the Niger on that historic and inspirational achievement. We were also heartened to see how President Bazoum immediately put youth, education and safe schools at the centre of his agenda. As he stated during our recent open debate on children and conflict (see S/2021/617), educated children are the pillars on which strong nations are built.

However, if we needed a reminder of the challenges that continue to face children and civilians in the region the Solhan massacre in Burkina Faso was it. Not only were children among the more than 130 victims of the attack. Children were also used by terrorist actors to carry out the attack. We condemn that in the strongest possible terms in addition to the continued targeting of children as victims of abduction sexual and gender-based violence. The perpetrators of such crimes must be held accountable in line with national and international law. We also deplore the repeated abduction of school children for ransom in Nigeria. As part of their efforts to find solutions to that trend, we commend Nigeria for hosting the fourth international Conference on the Safe Schools Declaration, to be held in October.

The Council must remain vigilant and find ways to support regional responses to terrorism, which is worryingly spreading seawards. Action is also needed in the Gulf of Guinea, which remains the world's piracy hotspot. Besides the threat posed to international navigation, piracy also has detrimental effects on the sustainable development of coastal States, as well as countries further inland. In order to better understand such effects, Norway is currently supporting a study by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime on the topic.

We also underscore the need for sustainable ocean planning to build the foundations for a peaceful and prosperous coastal economy. Last week, the Peacebuilding Commission held a positive meeting on the Gulf of Guinea. For us, that is a topic that the Council should once again look into, particularly in support of regional efforts.

Norway recently presented its new holistic Sahel strategy. The strategy mirrors our overall priorities on the Security Council — peace diplomacy, women's participation and rights, the protection of civilians, climate and security. Norway appreciates and encourages the continued engagement of UNOWAS on all those issues. Our new strategy places enhanced emphasis on the promotion of good governance and inclusive political processes, as ways to prevent violent conflict and the recruitment of armed groups.

The strategy also has a strong focus on dialogue as a means of conflict resolution at the local, national and regional levels. We are encouraged to see that that thinking aligns with signals from the ordinary session of the Authority of Heads of State of the Group of

Five for the Sahel, held in N'Djamena in February, the "nexus plus" vision of the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel and the People's Coalition for the Sahel.

The proposed civilian joint project to address intercommunal violence could be a good new opportunity for UNOWAS to make a difference. The project should also consider the effects of climate on security, as well as women's roles in peace and security. On all those issues, it will be vital for UNOWAS to work together with the African Union, ECOWAS, the Group of Five for the Sahel and other regional actors to unlock new potential.

**Mr. Dai Bing** (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I welcome the appointment of Mr. Annadif as Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Office for West Africa (UNOWAS) and the Sahel and his first briefing to the Security Council in his new capacity. We expect Special Representative of the Secretary-General Annadif at the helm of UNOWAS to play a greater role in promoting regional peace and development. I also listened closely to the statement by Ms. Ayemou, the civil society representative from Côte d'Ivoire.

Since the beginning of this year, the situation in West African and the Sahel has in general been stable. Burkina Faso, Ghana, the Niger and Benin have successfully completed their general elections and formed new Governments. Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire and others have actively promoted political dialogue. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) is active in maintaining regional peace and stability by participating in mediation efforts in Mali. China appreciates those developments.

The Gambia will hold general elections this year, and Mali has reached a critical stage of political transition. The international community should encourage the relevant parties to resolve their differences through dialogue and consultations and encourage ECOWAS and the African Union to continue to play a leading role, while respecting the sovereignty and leadership of the countries of the region when providing constructive support.

UNOWAS should render technical support for the upcoming general elections and political dialogue of relevant countries in the light of the regional situation on the ground. The security situation in the region remains fragile, with frequent terrorist attacks

and violent incidents, resulting in a large number of civilian casualties. In his report (S/2021/612), the Secretary-General points out that the limitations of a security approach require a response that integrates development, governance and humanitarian dimensions to address the root causes of the conflicts.

The international community should continue to help the countries of the region to enhance capacities in peacekeeping, counter-terrorism and the maintenance of stability, and encourage them to strengthen security cooperation by jointly addressing cross-border security challenges, such as piracy and drug trafficking in the Gulf of Guinea.

At the same time, it is necessary to adopt integrated policies to treat both the symptoms and the root causes and to tackle the problems at the source. Under the current circumstances, it is important to help relevant countries to restore State authority, improve governance capacities and promote economic and social development. Providing security guarantees to people and allowing to share the fruits of poverty reduction and development will help to fully counter the infiltration and influence of extremism and terrorism.

Last month, ECOWAS held a summit during which a series of important measures were announced to advance regional economic integration, including joining in the creation of an African continent free-trade zone and working on a single currency for West Africa. These are firm steps towards regional integration. UNOWAS must support regional countries in promoting friendship, deepening cooperation, advancing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel and closely align regional cooperation priorities with national development strategies in order to create synergies.

The efforts of the countries of the region to actively fight the pandemic deserve our full recognition. At present, the virus is still spreading in Africa, and efforts towards regional prevention and control must not flag. The international community should provide more supplies, medicine, technology and funding to assist in combating the pandemic, and should ensure that vaccines are accessible and affordable. We must also pay attention to the economic and social impact of the pandemic on the countries of the region and coordinate prevention and management efforts, as well as post-pandemic reconstruction. Relevant developed countries should fulfil their international responsibilities and

take pragmatic measures debt relief and development assistance measures. Further, they should support the countries of the region in accelerating industrialization and modernization and enhance Africa's development and innovation capacities.

Since the outbreak of the pandemic, China has firmly stood with the countries of the region by sharing experiences and providing much-needed coronavirus vaccines and multiple shipments of supplies to combat the pandemic. In addition, my country has supported them in resuming work and production. In May, China and African countries jointly, through the New Partnership for Africa's Development, launched an initiative to that end. China welcomes more countries and international organizations to join that initiative and create synergies in support of Africa's development.

**The President** (*spoke in French*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of France.

I thank Mr. Annadif for his briefing and Ms. Ayemou for hers. The emancipation and political participation of women are priorities for France.

I would like to address two points.

The first is sustainable development and security. Those two imperatives must go hand in hand as insecurity spreads in the region. France was horrified about the recent massacres in Burkina Faso. In that country, as well as in Mali and the Niger, hundreds of civilians and members of the defence and security forces have been killed in recent months.

This situation requires a response. We must provide the countries of the region with the resources they need to combat terrorism. To that end, the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel must be supported. We are impatiently awaiting the report of the Secretary-General in September, which will consider options for improvements in that area. The International Academy for Combating Terrorism, inaugurated in Côte d'Ivoire in June and supported by France, is another essential project for combating terrorism.

We also encourage the cooperation of coastal countries with those of the Sahel. Joint operations between Côte d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso and Mali are promising initiatives. In order to prevent the spread of insecurity, France encourages the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel and the United Nations to conduct prevention activities in southern

Mali, south-western Burkina Faso and northern Côte d'Ivoire. The Peacebuilding Fund is a useful tool in that regard.

It is also essential that confidence be restored between States and their populations. France welcomes the launching by United Nations Development Programme of the Liptako-Gourma stabilization facility, which is aimed at redeploying State authority and providing services to populations living in remote areas of the Sahel. Those objectives are in lock-step with those of the civilian and political surge agreed upon during the N'Djamena summit. We must also take into account, in all of our actions, the fight against the effects of climate change.

My second point concerns the political situations. France encourages the consolidation of democratic processes in West Africa and the Sahel. We welcome the holding of legislative elections in Côte d'Ivoire in March, and in Cabo Verde in April. We hope that

the presidential elections in The Gambia, planned for December, will take place in peaceful conditions. Elections are an important step and, where necessary, can be supplemented with political dialogue and reconciliation efforts.

In Guinea, we take note of the announcement of a new permanent framework for political and social dialogue, and we call on all political actors to sincerely engage in that process, which must include the parliamentary and extraparliamentary opposition. We support the good offices of the Special Representative on this matter.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers.

*The meeting rose at 11.15 a.m.*