



# Security Council

Seventy-eighth year

**9384**<sup>th</sup> meeting

Tuesday, 25 July 2023, 10 a.m.

New York

*Provisional*

<i>President:</i>	Mr. Kariuki . . . . .	(United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland)
<i>Members:</i>	Albania . . . . .	Mr. Spasse
	Brazil . . . . .	Mr. Moretti
	China . . . . .	Mr. Geng Shuang
	Ecuador . . . . .	Mr. Pérez Loose
	France . . . . .	Mrs. Broadhurst Estival
	Gabon . . . . .	Mrs. Ngyema Ndong
	Ghana . . . . .	Mr. Agyeman
	Japan . . . . .	Mrs. Shino
	Malta . . . . .	Ms. Gatt
	Mozambique . . . . .	Mr. Afonso
	Russian Federation . . . . .	Ms. Evstigneeva
	Switzerland . . . . .	Mrs. Baeriswyl
	United Arab Emirates . . . . .	Mr. Abushahab
	United States of America . . . . .	Mr. Wood

## 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/2023/490)

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the translation of speeches delivered in other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. *Corrections* should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room AB-0601 (verbatimrecords@un.org). Corrected records will be reissued electronically on the Official Document System of the United Nations (<http://documents.un.org>).



*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/2023/490)**

**The President:** In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mr. Leonardo Santos Simão, Special Representative and Head of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel; and His Excellency Mr. Omar Aliou Touray, President of the Commission of the Economic Community of West African States.

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/2023/490, 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. Simão.

**Mr. Simão:** I am honoured to present today the Secretary-General's report (S/2023/490) on the situation in West Africa and the Sahel and the activities of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) for the first time since assuming office. I would also like to congratulate the United Kingdom presidency of the Security Council for this month for its leadership.

Allow me to start by welcoming the holding of elections in several countries in West Africa and the Sahel, namely in Benin, the Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Mauritania, Nigeria and Sierra Leone. These elections have marked important steps towards democratic consolidation, offering opportunities for citizens to choose their leaders and representatives at the national and subnational levels. In Nigeria, voters, especially young voters, injected a new vibrancy into the electoral competition. In Guinea-Bissau, the opposition secured an absolute majority after peaceful parliamentary elections, whose results were accepted by all.

That notwithstanding, the often keenly contested polls also exposed real challenges. In a number of countries, there were concerns over a shrinking civic

and political space and the lack of transparency in vote tabulation and transmission, which undermined citizens' trust in the electoral processes. Those challenges should be addressed way ahead of future elections. In that context, I welcome the national dialogue convened by President Macky Sall of Senegal. The ongoing proactive implementation of the recommendations of the dialogue is noteworthy as Senegal moves to hold its presidential election in February next year.

For its part, UNOWAS supported the various electoral processes — not only through high-level good offices, but also through support for pre-electoral interparty dialogues and confidence-building initiatives among stakeholders in Benin and Nigeria, amid other initiatives.

I would also like to highlight how UNOWAS is enhancing its partnerships with regional partners to reinforce the rule of law, against the backdrop of concerns over the impartiality of the judiciary in parts of the region. Notably, in collaboration with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), UNOWAS is partnering with the West African Bar Association to strengthen justice systems and will organize a regional conference in August in Accra.

Despite the encouraging steps towards democratic consolidation, the continued underrepresentation of women across the region in political processes and decision-making not only deprives half of the population of essential rights, but is also a massive impediment to development. Therefore, notwithstanding some notable advances registered during the period, I call upon all stakeholders, in particular Governments and political parties, to promote legislation and ensure the effective application of existing instruments on women's empowerment and gender equality.

Moreover, with more than 60 per cent of the population being younger than 25, young people are an important group whose voice is not yet being fully heard in peacebuilding efforts. UNOWAS has continued to advocate for greater inclusiveness of youth in electoral and decision-making processes. In that regard, I was pleased to engage students and young professionals at the regional youth forum organized by UNOWAS in Cabo Verde, which resulted in the Mindelo call to action.

*(spoke in French)*

As part of my introductory visits to the region since taking office, I have been received by the authorities of Senegal; Guinea-Bissau; Nigeria, through the ECOWAS Commission; Côte d'Ivoire; Burkina Faso; Sierra Leone; the Niger; Cabo Verde and Guinea. Those visits enabled me to talk to the authorities about the transitions under way and to understand the scale of the crisis in the Sahel.

In Burkina Faso, I noted the determination of the transitional authorities to re-establish security throughout the country and their willingness to tackle the many challenges facing their country and the subregion. I also take note of the processes under way in Guinea and Mali to return to constitutional order within the allotted time, and I believe that our efforts must converge towards that major objective.

In Mali, we are facing the major challenges of a difficult transition, given the imminent departure of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). I intend to visit Bamako as soon as possible to discuss the situation with the authorities, partners and United Nations colleagues.

The crisis in the Sahel crisis is the sum of complex circumstances, and its resolution requires concrete, realistic and long-term support from the region and beyond, in order to achieve lasting peace. The people of the region are constantly reminding us of our collective obligation to support the efforts of their countries to resolve these crises and put an end to the scourge of terrorism that has marked their daily lives for too long.

In this respect, I would also like to bear witness to the commitment of the States in the region, reiterated at the sixty-third ordinary summit of ECOWAS Heads of State and Government, which I attended. Accordingly, I welcome the participation of the President of the ECOWAS Commission, Mr. Omar Alieu Touray, in today's meeting of the Security Council. The summit's decisions demonstrate, if proof were still needed, the concern of the Heads of State, as well as their unequivocal determination to tackle the crises and re-establish contact between ECOWAS mediators and the authorities of the countries in transition.

The decision to hold an extraordinary ECOWAS summit at the end of August, preceded by a meeting of Ministers of Defence and Finance, will enable the

region to focus more closely on the burning issues of insecurity, including in the countries in transition.

*(spoke in English)*

The security situation in the Central Sahel has deteriorated further, with multiple attacks against civilians and defence and security forces, especially in the Liptako-Gourma area. Encouraged by the recent decision by ECOWAS to fully operationalize the 2020–2024 Action Plan for the eradication of terrorism in the region, using mandatory contributions from its members. I would like to appeal to partners to lend robust and decisive support to this commendable initiative. Leveraging our comparative advantages, we need to join forces with the African Union, ECOWAS and affected Member States to make a decisive move to stem insecurity in the Sahel.

*(spoke in French)*

I would like to emphasize the humanitarian impact of the crisis facing our region. The rate of food insecurity is alarming, particularly in areas where instability has interrupted agricultural production. The 6.3 million people across the Sahel who have been displaced are another gravely worrisome humanitarian consequence. A growing number of these displaced populations are seeking refuge in coastal countries, including Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana. I appeal to all stakeholders to work together to preserve the dignity of refugees and the security of host and transit countries.

Insecurity also has a direct impact on future generations. Before our very eyes, more than 11,000 schools are closed across Burkina Faso, Mali, the Niger and Nigeria, depriving children of education and prospects, thereby mortgaging their fundamental rights and the future of their countries.

*(spoke in English)*

To conclude, I would like to share with Council members the progress achieved by the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission, which is another example of peacebuilding beyond the limelight of everyday news. Of note, final mapping and the construction of pillars demarcating the border between the two countries are proceeding steadily, with only three areas of disagreement remaining. To assist in these sensitive processes, financial support will be required to stimulate confidence-building between the affected communities.

I would like to thank the Council for its continued support of UNOWAS. You may rest assured, Mr. President, that, in line with our mandate, we will continue to work together with our regional and international partners to consolidate much-needed peace, security and democracy in West Africa and the Sahel.

**The President:** I thank Mr. Simão for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Touray.

**Mr. Touray:** The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) welcomes this opportunity to brief the Security Council on the political and security situation in West Africa. We are grateful to the United Kingdom's presidency of the Council this month for the invitation to do so. I particularly welcome the opportunity to take the floor just after the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS), Mr. Simão, with whom I continue to work very closely in the region.

Let us remind ourselves about a few features of the subregion. The 400 million people of the region comprise in large part young ambitious and dynamic people. The youthful population, the fertile land and natural resources of the region hold considerable promise for the people of West Africa. That promise hinges on governance and security. By governance, I am referring not only to the assumption of power through inclusive democratic processes, but also to accountability in the management of public affairs.

The region's performance on this score needs to be recognized. Out of the 15 countries in the region, 12 have democratically elected Governments. Twelve have term limits enshrined in their Constitutions, and we are confident that this number will increase shortly. Major elections that have taken place in the region this year alone include the presidential, legislative and state elections in Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Guinea-Bissau. The good showing by the oppositions in the various countries suggests that democracy is alive in the region.

But the region is worried about the resurgence of the military in the political space. The fact that 3 out of the 15 countries of the region are under military rule is indicative of a reversal of the region's democratic gains. For ECOWAS, this is unacceptable, and all the countries must return to constitutional order within the specified

time frames. Not only is the Security Council's support for transition to constitutional order in all of these three countries crucial, but it is also in our collective interest.

The reversal of democratic gains runs parallel to the insecurity that West Africa and the Sahel have been facing for some time now. We can spend the whole day talking about the drivers of insecurity in the region, but allow me to single out terrorism, armed rebellion, organized crime, unconstitutional change of government, illegal maritime activities, environmental crises and fake news as being the key drivers of insecurity in the subregion.

Victims of insecurity — those killed, maimed and displaced and those who have lost livelihoods — are the subject of conflicting figures. Yet all the figures are indicative of the pain and suffering that insecurity continues to inflict on the people. For example, from 1 January to 30 June 2023, 1,814 incidents of terrorist attacks were recorded in the ECOWAS region. These incidents resulted in 4,593 fatalities: 2,725 were recorded in Burkina Faso; 844 in Mali; 211 in the Niger; 77 in Nigeria; and 70 in Benin. Terrorist attacks in the Republic of Benin and the Togolese Republic are a stark indication of the expansion of terrorist attacks to littoral States, a situation that poses an additional threat to the region. The insecurity continues to have dire humanitarian consequences, with a significant number of refugees and internally displaced populations in Nigeria, Mali, the Niger and Burkina Faso. By the end of April 2023, a total of half a million refugees were recorded in the region, with significant numbers in Burkina Faso, Mali, the Niger and Nigeria. The total number of internally displaced persons stands at 6,182,117, with 2 million in Burkina Faso, 3.3 million in Nigeria and almost half a million in Mali.

The food security situation in the region suggests that insecurity does not only affect our present, but also threatens our future. Our assessments have indicated that nearly 30 million people are in need of food assistance. In the absence of an adequate response, the number of people needing food assistance will increase from 30 million to 42 million by the end of next month. That is just a snippet of the horrendous impact of insecurity in West Africa.

Responses to insecurity in the region have been diverse. They include bilateral, plurilateral and multilateral arrangements, such as Operation Barkhane, the Takuba Task Force, the Group of Five for the Sahel,

the Accra Initiative and the Multinational Joint Task Force, the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali and ECOWAS' own plan of action for the eradication of terrorism. Those important initiatives and operations have had impact on the ground.

However, while we acknowledge the role of those initiatives, we cannot ignore some of the challenges they present. The multiplicity of such initiatives present problems of coordination, ownership and inclusion. ECOWAS' proposal is to integrate the various initiatives into the regional plan of action and to use them as specialized operational tools of the regional mechanism. That will facilitate coordination, promote ownership and enhance inclusion.

ECOWAS Heads of State and Government have taken three decisions aimed at facilitating the transition to such an inclusive arrangement. The first decision is to undertake a review of the mandate of the regional Standby Force, with a view to enabling it to address the challenges of insecurity through various forms of intervention, including kinetic operations. The second decision relates to financing for the regional mechanism, and the third relates to the review of the existing plan of action with a view to updating and aligning it with the new decisions taken.

The consultations that have taken place among the Chiefs of Defence Staff of member States seek to strengthen the mandate of the regional Standby Force in a manner that will enable it to support member States in their fight against terrorism and threats to constitutional order. Two options have been proposed by the military chiefs, namely a brigade of 5,000 troops at an annual cost of \$2.3 billion or a deployment of troops on demand at an annual cost of \$360 million. Those recommendations predate the decision of the Council to close MINUSMA in Mali (resolution 2690 (2023)).

Yet regional leaders have reflected on the possible adverse impact of the withdrawal on the region and have decided to convene an extraordinary session on peace and security by the end of August 2023. In preparation for the extraordinary summit, a troika of the Heads of State of Nigeria, Benin and Guinea-Bissau, plus the Niger, met on 18 July to reflect on the political and security situation in the region. Their conclusions constitute the main message I would like to bring to the attention of the Council.

With respect to the political situation in the region, the leaders of the region have decided to re-engage the three member States in transition at the highest level. To that end, His Excellency Mr. Patrice Talon, President of the Republic of Benin, will undertake a consultative visit in the three countries on behalf of the troika. The leaders have underscored their resolve to see an expeditious return to constitutional order in those member States, in accordance with the relevant ECOWAS protocols and the transition charters of each of the three countries. The leaders have reaffirmed ECOWAS' commitment to supporting credible and inclusive democratic elections in each of the three countries. The leaders have also reaffirmed their support for the Algiers peace process, which seeks to facilitate a peaceful settlement between the Government of Mali and the armed groups. The leaders call on the international community, especially members of the Security Council, to support the Algiers peace process in Mali, as well as the ECOWAS position on the transitions in the region.

On the security situation in the region, the leaders stressed the region's resolve to provide a robust response to threats to peace in the region. The regional response shall include the expeditious operationalization of a revised ECOWAS plan of action for the eradication of terrorism in the region. It will also include collaboration with other security initiatives and the provision of direct support to member States, including countries in transition, in their fight against terrorism. The leaders reiterated their strong commitment to financing the regional security mechanisms from the region's own resources.

The regional resolve does not take away the Security Council's responsibility for the maintenance of world peace. In that regard, the leaders of the region reiterate their support for the African Union's request for predictable funding for African-led missions through assessed contributions. That position has been adequately supported and defended by the Secretary-General of the United Nations on several occasions, most recently in his report of 1 May 2023 on the implementation of resolutions 2320 (2016) and 2378 (2017) and considerations related to the financing of African Union peace support operations mandated by the Security Council (S/2023/303).

Allow me to conclude this statement by quoting the report of the Secretary-General:



“...[T]he time when requests related to peace support operations could be considered as exceptional circumstances is behind us; to more effectively meet the challenges of today, support to such operations must be considered in a more systematic manner. [...] I urge the Security Council to signal its clear support for providing African Union peace support operations with access to United Nations assessed contributions. This would represent a concrete demonstration that the Council stands ready to break new ground and address a critical gap in the international peace and security architecture, as well as a strong reaffirmation of the willingness of the Council to stem the scourge of armed conflict on the African continent.” (S/2023/303, para. 38 and 44)

**The President:** I thank Mr. Touray for his briefing.

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

**Mr. Agyeman** (Ghana): I deliver this statement on behalf of the three African members of the Council (A3), namely, Gabon, Mozambique and Ghana.

We welcome the report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) (S/2023/490) and avail ourselves of this opportunity to warmly congratulate Mr. Leonardo Santos Simão on his appointment as Special Representative of the Secretary-General for West Africa and the Sahel and Head of UNOWAS. We are pleased with the Special Representative's active engagement with the countries of the region since his recent assumption of duty and encourage his further efforts in the implementation of the UNOWAS mandate. We thank him for his first briefing to the Council.

We also thank Mr. Omar Alieu Touray, President of the Commission of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) for his important remarks and take good note of his views on developments in the region and the determination of the region to respond to the security challenges and the request for solidarity with members of the Community.

Since the last briefing to the Council (see/S/PV.9238) and the renewal of UNOWAS's mandate, we have seen democracy consolidated in Nigeria and Sierra Leone, as well as in Benin, Guinea-Bissau, Mauritania and the Gambia. We note the need for continuing international and regional support for the upcoming elections in the region and encourage the ongoing efforts to restore

constitutional order in the three transitional countries, particularly Mali, where the referendum held in June should lay out a pathway for further efforts based on an inclusive process. We urge the Malian authorities and the signatory groups to remain engaged in realizing the objectives of the Algiers peace agreement, and we affirm our support for Mali's sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity.

The A3, however, remains concerned about the security situation in the region, especially in the countries of the Sahel, where a loss of territory to terrorists and armed groups is creating new waves of displacement and their humanitarian consequences. We note the interlocking nature of the unfolding crises and the need for a comprehensive approach to resolving them. Against that backdrop, we would like to make a few critical remarks.

First, on the political front, we encourage the countries of the region to fulfil their obligations under regional arrangements such as the ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance. The fact is that democratic, inclusive and participatory practices are essential to maintaining the stability of any country, and amid the adverse impact of the coronavirus disease pandemic and various geopolitical disputes, the fragilities of the countries of the region should be managed through a participatory approach to governance, involving young people, women and minority groups. We welcome the commitment of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and his team, in close collaboration with regional stakeholders, to implementing ECOWAS's core principles, as reiterated in the communiqué of the sixty-third ordinary meeting of the Authority of Heads of State and Government of ECOWAS, held on 9 July.

Secondly, with respect to the security situation, the growing incidence of terrorism and violent extremism and their evolving methods of operation are of major concern. We strongly condemn attacks by terrorist groups on civilians and security personnel in the region and pay tribute to all who have lost their lives. As the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) carries on with its withdrawal from Mali, we urge for coordinated action with the neighbouring countries to minimize any further adverse security consequences for Mali and the region. We look forward to the Secretary-General's report to the Council in August, clarifying the role that UNOWAS and other United Nations agencies can play following MINUSMA's withdrawal.

Ensuring logistical, operational and funding support for regional mechanisms, such as the Multinational Joint Task Force, the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel and the Accra Initiative, is now more critical than ever. We welcome the decision to activate the ECOWAS Standby Force and provide the requisite support for its deployment and for the implementation of the ECOWAS action plan for the eradication of terrorism. We note the commitment to enhancing synergies among the regional initiatives, led by the three-member-plus-one presidential troika, and look forward to the outcomes of the ECOWAS Extraordinary Summit, to be held in August to deliberate on concrete measures for addressing the security situation in the region, including transitions.

Still on the security front, we encourage the sustained monitoring of the situation in Libya and the importance of embracing a coordinated approach in order to avert the threat that the return of foreign terrorist fighters poses to the stability of the region, including through the proliferation of small arms and light weapons. We remain hopeful that the wide consultations conducted by the Independent High-Level Panel on Security and Development in the Sahel, led by former President Issoufou, aimed at developing an assessment report on the Sahel, will emerge with elements supporting the regional security initiatives to address the challenges in the region. We encourage the support of the international community for the ongoing regional efforts.

Thirdly, regarding the humanitarian situation, which is a result of the escalation of conflicts and other drivers such as deteriorating socioeconomic circumstances and the adverse effects of climate change, the A3 would like to draw the attention of the international community to the more than 6 million people who have been displaced and the approximately 10,000 schools that have been closed. We need to move beyond a business-as-usual approach to addressing the issue. We call for donor partners to prioritize the implementation of humanitarian response plans for countries in West Africa and the Sahel by helping to meet the \$3.5 billion target required to tackle the increasing humanitarian needs.

Lastly, we encourage a comprehensive approach to addressing the challenges in West Africa and the Sahel, including support for measures to tackle the root causes of the crises. That should include support for addressing the deficits in governance and development, but also a commitment to forging national consensus in the countries of the region to ensure that women and young people play an equal and meaningful role in all

decision-making and governance processes. In that regard, we welcome support for integrating the human security concerns of women and young people into the recently adopted 2022–2026 ECOWAS Early Warning and Early Response Strategic Plan and encourage further support for the implementation of the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel.

Regarding climate change, Gabon, Mozambique and Ghana believe that it is aggravating the prevailing crises in the region, having led to displacement and uncontrolled competition over shrinking natural resources, among other problems. In that regard, we welcome support for implementing regional initiatives such as the Dakar Call to Action on Climate Change, Peace and Security in West Africa and the Sahel. We also welcome the advisory note of the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) for today's meeting and underscore the need for more support for its work to enable the region to harness the positive dividends from the PBC's intervening role, including in climate-related peace and development issues, as well as in the promotion of community-based dispute-resolution mechanisms.

In conclusion, we reaffirm our respect for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of all countries of the region. The A3 would like to emphasize that the demonstration of strong political will at the national, regional and international levels, including by the Council, remains crucial to addressing the multifaceted challenges facing the region. We call on all Council members to commit to adopting the draft UNOWAS presidential statement in support of the mandate of the new Special Representative as soon as possible.

**Mrs. Baeriswyl** (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): I would like to welcome Mr. Leonardo Santos Simão, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General. I wish him every success in his new role and look forward to continuing our productive cooperation with him. I also thank the President of the Commission of the Economic Community of West African States for his briefing, and the Peacebuilding Commission for its written advice.

We welcome the positive developments since our last meeting (see S/PV.9238) such as those related to elections and to transitional justice and accountability efforts. However, today's briefing makes it clear that the security situation in the region remains very fragile and that humanitarian needs are increasing. I would therefore like to make three points.

First, with regard to the elections, we are pleased to note that the polls have so far been largely peaceful. We welcome the ongoing commitment of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) to promoting democratic governance and peaceful electoral processes. It is a long-term effort based on trust and regular dialogue, and it reflects the good reputation that UNOWAS enjoys. However, while notable progress has been made at the State level, in particular in Benin and Mauritania, as the Special Representative mentioned, women have remained largely underrepresented throughout the region in political processes and decision-making. We call for a more in-depth and contextual analysis of the underlying reasons for that in order to ensure the full and meaningful participation of women throughout the electoral process cycle.

Secondly, with regard to the security situation, investing in violence prevention and peacebuilding requires a commitment to addressing the various security, political, economic, cultural and social causes underlying such violence. That was reiterated in February at the conference entitled “Grand Rendez-vous for the Prevention of Violent Extremism in West and Central Africa”, organized by UNOWAS, Switzerland and Senegal in Dakar. It is imperative that States and regional organizations, in particular the African Union and ECOWAS, translate the Secretary-General’s Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism into reality. The conference showed us that dialogue, including with violent extremists, is key to achieving lasting peace.

Lastly, we are facing a serious humanitarian crisis as a result of instability, conflict, forced displacement, food insecurity and climate change. The crisis is affecting millions of people in the region. The situation of young people and children in West Africa and the Sahel remains particularly worrisome. Attacks on schools are often committed in tandem with other serious violations, such as sexual and gender-based violence. In general, we are seeing a deterioration in access to health and education services. We cannot remain indifferent to those developments.

Switzerland welcomes the work of UNOWAS on climate change, peace and security in the context of the Dakar Call to Action. My country welcomes the ongoing analysis of climate security risks. As Ms. Aïssatou Diouf told the Council in May,

“It is no longer relevant to address the crisis in the Sahel on the basis of security issues. We need multisectoral responses that take into account current and future climate issues.” (S/PV.9322, p. 6)

That will allow for an easing of the pressure on humanitarian aid in the long term and help communities to recover. In that regard, and in order to strengthen the resilience of more than 700,000 people in Burkina Faso, Switzerland is supporting a programme aimed at de-escalating disputes between farmers and herders by adapting breeding methods and livelihood means to climate challenges.

The report of the Secretary-General (S/2023/490) once again highlights the importance of the role of UNOWAS in overcoming the many challenges in the region. The extension of the mandate in January attests to the Council’s continued support for the mission. Switzerland stands ready to promote dialogue among stakeholders to explore the possibility of delegating certain tasks that have been carried out by the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali to UNOWAS, if appropriate. In addition, as co-penholder, and together with Ghana, we will continue our efforts to adopt a presidential statement as soon as possible, in order to underline the Council’s strong interest in the region. After two years, it is time to reiterate our collective support for the valuable and important work of the regional Office in all areas of its mandate.

**Mr. Wood** (United States of America): I thank Special Representative Simão and Mr. Touray for their very informative briefings.

The United States remains gravely concerned about democratic backsliding across the region and strongly supports the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) and its instrumental role in preventing and mitigating conflict, addressing election-related crises and promoting inclusive dialogue processes in the region. We recognize the continued efforts of UNOWAS to help promote and sustain democratic processes and advise transitional Governments in West Africa and the Sahel, particularly in Mali, Burkina Faso, Guinea and Sierra Leone. Although we are concerned about the lack of transparency in the tabulation process for the 24 June general elections in Sierra Leone and irregularities in the election results announced by the Electoral Commission, we applaud the people of Sierra Leone for



participating in the elections, which play a vital role in any democracy. We reiterate our support to transition processes in Mali, Burkina Faso and Guinea and continue to call for a return to democratic governance. We support the United Nations and Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) leadership in holding transition Governments accountable to their stated timelines to return to constitutional order and for promoting stability in the region.

Turning from democratic transitions to humanitarian needs, we want to underscore the urgency of the arrival of the new United Nations Resident Coordinator in Burkina Faso and share the concerns expressed by the United Nations on the transitional Government of Burkina Faso's actions that led to the departure of the previous United Nations Resident Coordinator. The United Nations Resident Coordinator leads the United Nations work to support development efforts and is vital to leading the delivery of much-needed humanitarian assistance for the people of Burkina Faso.

Given the situation in the region, accountability is especially important. We reiterate our call on the transition Government in Mali to pursue an independent, impartial, efficient, comprehensive and transparent investigation to hold accountable those responsible for the civilian killings in Moura, Mali, consistent with the recommendation in the relevant May 2023 report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

The UNOWAS mandate is all the more important in the light of the Mali transition Government's decision to end the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). It is critical that the transition Government of Mali fully cooperate with the United Nations to ensure the safe and orderly withdrawal of MINUSMA. That includes fully respecting the status-of-forces agreement until the final MINUSMA element departs, beyond December 31. Once the MINUSMA transition plan is finalized, we would welcome a serious discussion in the appropriate forum on what additional resources for UNOWAS might be needed to ensure continued support for UNOWAS and its increased activities.

We remain deeply concerned about the spread of instability in coastal West Africa, both from national political dynamics and the proximity of violent extremism in the Sahel. The growing threats have cost thousands of lives and contributed to displacement

across the region. We cannot ignore the fact that the Wagner Group is committing human rights abuses and endangering the safety and security of civilians, peacekeepers and United Nations personnel. They are obstructing the work of United Nations peacekeepers and not only failing to address the immediate violent extremist threat, but contributing to the likelihood that it will grow.

Finally, the United States calls on members of the Security Council to reinvigorate our collective action and engage with African partners in addressing the problems that cross borders. We applaud the efforts of the United Nations, UNOWAS, the African Union and ECOWAS to support the region and hope to soon see a presidential statement reaffirm that commitment.

**Mr. Abushahab** (United Arab Emirates): I want to begin by extending our sincere congratulations to Special Representative of the Secretary-General Simão on his appointment and express our deep appreciation to Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General Biha for her engagement with the Security Council. The United Arab Emirates remains steadfast in its support to the important work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and that of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS). I also thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Simão and the President of the Commission of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Mr. Touray, for their insightful briefings today. Furthermore, we welcome the advice from the Peacebuilding Commission, which informs the Council's understanding of the region. Its continuous contributions are vital to our work.

Our briefers today elaborated on how the countries for which UNOWAS has responsibility are facing the dual challenge of insecurity and a changing climate. According to the report of the Secretary-General (S/2023/490), 6.3 million individuals remain displaced across the Sahel and coastal countries, and more than 37 million people require humanitarian assistance. Addressing those challenges necessitates a rethinking of the long-held assumptions and approaches previously deployed — not only focusing on the current challenges of the present, but the longer-term efforts needed to help shape and build a more stable, secure and peaceful horizon for the region, and not only focusing on the national level, but also considering the challenges on a region-wide basis.

I would like to make four brief points today to that effect.

First, maintaining security in the region demands a multitrack approach. According to the Global Terrorism Index, four countries across West Africa are among the top 10 most affected by terrorism. Protecting civilians is not simply an exercise in response to threats — it must also be about proactively creating a secure environment from the ground up. In that light, soft and hard security solutions, including building community resilience through basic services, all form part of a comprehensive security strategy for the region. Beyond national efforts, regional security cooperation has paid dividends in tackling cross-border threats and transnational organized crime. We have seen a decline in terrorist incidents in the Lake Chad basin, as well as improved maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea, owing to best practices being shared from country to country. We welcome the growing coordination between ECOWAS and the Accra Initiative.

Secondly, all the parties to a conflict must adhere to their obligations under international humanitarian law. Humanitarian actors currently face significant challenges in reaching those in need. We urge all the relevant actors to facilitate humanitarian actors' safe access to civilians who need life-saving assistance. Against a backdrop of great insecurity, women and girls in the region are at greater risk of sexual violence and abduction by armed groups. Humanitarian actors must be allowed to provide the necessary services to people affected by those violations, and the perpetrators must be held accountable.

Thirdly, the Council must approach insecurity in the region through a climate-sensitive lens. Increased desertification and reduced rainfall are shrinking already scarce food and water resources. Agriculture is hindered, leaving citizens without food and employment and rendering them increasingly vulnerable to recruitment by armed groups. In West Africa we see those dynamics writ large. Climate change has also further entrenched the epidemic of gender-based violence and inequality, as women and girls are exposed to more precarious situations when food insecurity persists. We must therefore make concerted efforts to better understand and address the interplay between climate, peace and security.

Fourthly and finally, long-term regional stability will be built on a foundation of resilient institutions. Part and parcel of building those institutions in West Africa is

the conduct of free and fair elections. The recent holding of peaceful elections in Guinea-Bissau, Nigeria, Sierra Leone and other countries is a positive step forward, as are the ongoing dialogue initiatives and efforts to ensure the participation of women in the upcoming elections in the region. Regarding the transition processes under way, it is important to continue making headway, as agreed with ECOWAS, and we welcome the Special Representative's close coordination with ECOWAS to engage the authorities of the countries concerned in upholding their commitments on an agreed timeline. In that respect, we also welcome the establishment of the ECOWAS Presidential Task Force.

As the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) begins its withdrawal, we encourage UNOWAS to sustain United Nations engagement with the Malian authorities, both regional and national, and to help ensure a smooth transition. We look forward to the Secretary-General's presentation of the plan in August for the transfer of MINUSMA's tasks, bearing in mind the possible contribution of UNOWAS and other stakeholders. The United Arab Emirates believes that the implementation of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali is essential, not only for Mali but for the region as a whole. We therefore encourage parties to remain engaged in its implementation.

As this will be the United Arab Emirates' final statement at a scheduled meeting on UNOWAS during its Security Council term, I would like to reflect one last time on the Office's legacy and significance. UNOWAS's ability to promote inclusive political processes and regional cooperation has come a long way. Looking to the future, its role in implementing the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel will help address the root causes of violence and foster community resilience. In the long run, the gains made by UNOWAS so far can be sustained only if international efforts are harmonized with national priorities through ECOWAS and the African Union, among others. The importance of the Council finding unity and speaking as one voice on UNOWAS, especially in terms of adopting a presidential statement on UNOWAS, cannot be overstated. If we succeed in doing that, our efforts will help the Special Representative of the Secretary-General deliver on his mandate to support the region. Ultimately, the Council's continued commitment to UNOWAS remains crucial for the well-being, prosperity and peace of present and future generations in the region.

**Mr. Geng Shuang** (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Special Representative Simão and President Touray for their briefings. China also congratulates Mr. Simão on his appointment and will continue to support the work of the Special Representative.

As the Secretary-General pointed out in his report (S/2023/490), over the past six months the countries of West Africa and the Sahel have achieved positive results in maintaining peace and stability and deepening regional cooperation. At the same time, they are facing multiple challenges, such as terrorism, food security and climate change. The international community and the Security Council should provide more constructive and targeted support. I would like to stress the following three points.

First, China is pleased to see the election results achieved in the region earlier this year, including the general elections in Nigeria and Sierra Leone, the constitutional referendum in Mali and the legislative elections in Benin, Guinea-Bissau and Mauritania. The smooth progress of those important political processes is of great significance to the consolidation of peace and stability in the region and the countries concerned. The international community and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) should continue to support countries in the region in enhancing governance and building capacity while taking the local context into account, promoting solidarity and cooperation through dialogue and consultation and following a development path that accords with their national conditions. Nigeria recently assumed the presidency of ECOWAS, and China hopes that under Nigeria's leadership, ECOWAS will continue to play an active role in promoting common development and maintaining common security in the region.

Secondly, China commends Nigeria, Mali, Burkina Faso and other countries for stepping up their counter-terrorism efforts. We support the launch of the ECOWAS Standby Force and the reorganization of the Sahel Joint Force. We hope that the countries of the region will uphold the concept of common security and promote counter-terrorism cooperation, and that ECOWAS's Extraordinary Summit, to be held in Nigeria next month, will inject new vitality into the process. Once the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali has completed its withdrawal, the international community should not scale back its support for Mali and regional countries in the fight against terrorism but should rather provide more support in terms of equipment, logistics and funding.

Thirdly, against the backdrop of a changing international landscape, West Africa and the Sahel are receiving less external aid and facing more difficulties in accessing foreign credit. The international community, especially the international financial institutions, should not allow other crises to lead them to reduce their aid and investment in the region. During its recent summit, ECOWAS called on the countries of the region to prioritize economic development, food security, interconnectivity and intraregional trade. The international community should align its assistance in both areas, identify development needs in the region and help it improve its independent development capabilities. China attaches great importance to the challenges brought by climate change to countries in the Sahel. It should be pointed out that funding shortfalls and a lack of technology are the primary challenges that countries in the region are facing in terms of climate response. The international community, especially developed countries, should translate political commitments into concrete action and play a leading and exemplary role in helping countries in the region.

China has always stood firmly with its friends, partners, brothers and sisters in West Africa and the Sahel. We have long-standing relations with the region and provide an enormous amount of political, economic and social support and assistance through bilateral and multilateral channels. We stand ready to work with the international community to make renewed contributions to maintaining regional peace and stability and promoting regional development and prosperity.

**Mrs. Shino** (Japan): I welcome Mr. Leonardo Simão in his capacity as Special Representative of the Secretary-General for West Africa and the Sahel and thank him and Mr. Touray, President of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), for their insightful briefings. I also thank the Peacebuilding Commission for its written advice.

Japan highly appreciates the work of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS), its active engagement at the regional, subregional and national levels in support of democratic processes and its continued coordination with the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa, recognizing that the challenges facing West and Central Africa are interconnected.

Today I want to touch on two pressing issues facing the region. First, the restoration and maintenance of legitimate and democratic governance is essential. We

welcome the holding of a number of elections this year in the region and look forward to seeing the forthcoming elections held in a peaceful, inclusive and transparent manner. While most of the elections this year have been conducted peacefully, not all have been without controversy. Any truly inclusive democratic process cannot have opposition candidates jailed or barred from running. Incendiary rhetoric and accusations must be avoided by all participants, and appropriate measures need to be taken against misinformation and disinformation.

Furthermore, Japan reiterates the importance of a return to constitutional order. Japan calls on Mali to continue to make every effort towards holding elections as agreed with the Economic Community of West African States and encourages UNOWAS and the United Nations country team to assist Mali. In that context, Japan welcomes the contributions of regional partners. We also hope to see positive developments in the political transitions in Guinea and Burkina Faso. Security cannot be achieved without accountable and inclusive governance.

That leads me to my second point. The security landscape across the Sahel has continued to deteriorate, particularly in Mali and Burkina Faso. In that regard, it is regrettable that the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali has to withdraw after a decade of its dedicated work, despite the many challenges Mali and the region continue to face. We stress the need to respect human rights in all security operations and urge the Mali transitional authorities to coordinate with their neighbours and with regional partners to avoid a security vacuum. A collective, holistic, and transnational security approach is necessary to combat violent extremists and terrorists, who operate across borders. In addition, we should not forget that the deterioration of the security situation in the Sahel is having a negative impact on neighbouring countries, including several coastal countries of the Gulf of Guinea.

Continued insecurity has increased the already-severe humanitarian needs, with widespread food insecurity, displacement and school closures, as we just heard from the briefers. On top of that, the effects of environmental degradation and climate change are deeply worrisome. In tackling those challenges and ensuring long-term peace and stability, people must be placed at the centre and given a sense of ownership, and Governments must build strong and robust institutions

to provide for their well-being. Recognizing the importance of human security, Japan has long provided development and institution-building assistance to the region.

I conclude by reiterating our commitment to continuing to work with bilateral, regional and international stakeholders for a stable and prosperous West Africa and Sahel.

**Mr. Pérez Loose** (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to thank Mr. Leonardo Santos Simão for his briefing this morning and congratulate him on his recent appointment as Special Representative and Head of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS). We wish him every success in his work. We also thank the Secretary-General for his detailed report on developments in the region (S/2023/490) and Mr. Omar Alieu Touray, President of the Commission of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), for his interesting briefing.

We would like to underscore three main points.

First, we reiterate our conviction that a sound and stable institutional framework is the key to improving the living conditions of populations and tackling the root causes of violence. In that regard, we congratulate the countries of the region that have taken important steps to consolidate their democratic processes and institutions by holding elections in recent months, particularly Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Benin, Guinea-Bissau and Mauritania. We also hope that the elections to be held in Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia and Togo will be conducted in a peaceful and transparent manner. We appreciate the efforts of ECOWAS, with the support of the United Nations, to restore constitutional order in Burkina Faso, Guinea and Mali, and we reiterate our call for compliance with the commitments agreed and timetables established for that purpose.

Secondly, we express our concern about the deterioration of the security situation in the central Sahel, particularly in Burkina Faso and Mali, and the persistent danger of the expansion of terrorist violence to the south. Ecuador expresses its solidarity with the victims of violence and reiterates its unequivocal condemnation of all terrorist acts, while recalling that the measures taken by States to combat that scourge must be based on respect for their obligations under international law, international humanitarian law, refugee law and human rights. In addition, we reiterate our call on the countries of the region to intensify



their cooperation in the fight against terrorism, and we appreciate the efforts being made in that regard, including the Accra Initiative.

Thirdly and finally, I want to comment on the humanitarian consequences of insecurity, which disproportionately affect the most vulnerable segments of society — women, young people, children and the elderly. Of particular concern is food insecurity, which would affect some 21.8 million people in the region. The efforts by UNOWAS to alleviate the suffering of those affected are a very important step in stopping the vicious circle of discontent and violence. In that regard, it is essential to continue the work of coordination among Governments and the United Nations system, while taking into account all the interrelated factors affecting the region. I therefore welcome the inputs that the Peacebuilding Commission has submitted to the Security Council and encourage all members to take them into consideration.

**Ms. Gatt** (Malta): I take this opportunity to welcome Mr. Simão, Special Representative and Head of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS), to his new role and thank him for his briefing. I thank the former Special Representative, Mr. Mahamat Saleh Annadif, for his work and Deputy Special Representative Biha for ensuring continuity over the past months. I also thank Mr. Omar Aliou Touray, President of the Commission of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), for his insightful briefing and the Peacebuilding Commission for its written advice.

The year 2023 is crucial for democracy in West Africa and the Sahel. Malta welcomes the recent elections in the region, which are a step in the right direction towards democracy and sustainable peace. We commend the good offices of UNOWAS, including its engagement with leaders. The increased representation of women as local councillors and mayors in the Gambia, the highest-ever proportion of women in Benin's National Assembly, the increased number of women parliamentarians in Mauritania and a quota for women's representation in Liberia are welcome achievements. However, we also note with concern the setbacks to women's representation and political participation in Nigeria, where the number of women in the National Assembly decreased by 19 per cent. Furthermore, any attacks on human rights defenders and the civic and political space continue to limit

the right of opinion and expression, and we strongly urge the authorities in the region to step up efforts in that regard.

Malta calls for a holistic approach towards deterring any extension of violence in the region by tackling the root causes of violent extremism and conflict. Education, human rights, sustainable development, justice and the rule of law must run parallel to counter-terrorism operations. We deplore violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law in any counter-terrorism efforts and strongly urge thorough investigations into alleged violations to ensure accountability.

In particular, we wish to underline our concern about the security situation in Mali. The withdrawal of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali carries potential risks for both Mali and its neighbours. We reiterate our call for the protection of civilians to be safeguarded in accordance with international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

Relevant stakeholders must focus on the needs of children and on the humanitarian response in the light of the grave violations being committed against them. We look forward to discussing how UNOWAS could potentially bridge that gap, following this development. We also take note of the establishment of the ECOWAS Presidential Task Force to deepen reflections on the withdrawal and any forthcoming security challenges.

Malta commends ECOWAS, members of the Accra Initiative and other regional organizations for their work in handling these challenges and strongly encourages full cooperation from countries of the region. We also commend UNOWAS for its collaboration with UN-Women and other organizations in advancing the women and peace and security agenda in the region. Malta remains deeply concerned by the dire humanitarian situation across the region, particularly in the Sahel, with millions more this year than in the previous reporting period requiring humanitarian assistance and with the majority expected to experience severe food insecurity, with elevated food prices also impacted by Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine.

As the region is heavily impacted by climate change, we continue to support UNOWAS in advocating for best practices on climate-change resilience and adaptation on the ground and in promoting an understanding of these practices among local communities. On that note,

we hope that the Council reaches an agreement on a presidential statement that truly reflects the situation on the ground.

In conclusion, we look forward to the recommendations of the Independent High-Level Panel on Security and Development in the Sahel, led by Mr. Issoufou, while reaffirming our strong support to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, UNOWAS and regional organizations. Peace and security in West Africa and the Sahel should remain at the heart of our efforts.

**Mr. Spasse** (Albania): Albania joins others in congratulating Mr. Simão for assuming the role of Special Representative for West Africa and the Sahel. I assure him of my delegation's full support and call on all stakeholders to engage constructively with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in tackling the complex regional challenges. We also welcome the President of the Commission of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Mr. Touray, and thank him for his valuable insight.

The situation in West Africa and the Sahel remains a pressing concern, encompassing political, security and humanitarian aspects. In that regard, allow me to make three points.

First, on the political front, we welcome the holding of elections in several countries, promoting the consolidation of democratic processes. However, the shrinking of the civic and political space remains worrisome. Albania underscores the importance of inclusive political dialogue and consensus-building among all stakeholders in order to sustain the progress achieved thus far.

We express concern about the continuous underrepresentation of women in political processes and call on Governments and political parties to prioritize women's empowerment through legislation and effective implementation of established mechanisms. In that respect, we commend the steps undertaken by Benin and Liberia aiming at increasing women's representation in their respective parliaments.

Furthermore, the ECOWAS mediation of political transitions remains crucial. We urge the transition authorities to strengthen cooperation and advance outstanding benchmarks in order to ensure a return to constitutional order within the agreed timelines.

Albania welcomes the Peacebuilding Commission's advice of 20 July emphasizing the urgent need to address the region's root causes of conflict by ensuring democratic consolidation and good governance, the rule of law, respect for human rights, gender equality, sustainable development and the inclusion of civil society.

Secondly, the security situation is increasingly perilous, with expanding terrorism, transnational organized crime, intercommunal violence and illicit financial flows. Violent extremist groups in Mali and Burkina Faso continue to target military and civilian infrastructure, resulting in severe human rights violations. As reported by the Secretary-General, violations against civilian populations in the conduct of counter-terrorism operations remain of serious concern. It is frustrating that approximately 10,000 schools across Burkina Faso, Mali, the Niger and Nigeria were closed or non-operational due to violence. Women and girls are the most vulnerable to sexual violence and abduction.

We call upon West African and Sahel States to enhance cross-border cooperation, working with the United Nations, the African Union, ECOWAS and the Group of Five for the Sahel to strengthen security and peacebuilding efforts. Strict adherence to human rights and international humanitarian law is crucial in all military activities. We express concern over the partnership with the Wagner Group, which poses a significant threat to those principles.

Thirdly, the humanitarian situation remains dire. The Sahel is grappling with escalating food insecurity, climate change implications and displaced persons, with humanitarian assistance reaching unprecedented levels.

Albania calls for a holistic approach that addresses the multifaceted challenges facing the region, spanning the security, governance and development nexus. We also stress the need to address the adverse impact of climate change and its implications for regional security. In that regard, we call on Council members to engage constructively on the presidential statement and demonstrate our united commitment to the region.

In conclusion, I would like to express our dedication to achieving peace and stability in the Sahel region. We commend ECOWAS for its tireless efforts and engagement with States to strengthen good

governance and the rule of law, and we anticipate the recommendations of the Independent High-Level Panel on Security and Development in the Sahel.

**Mrs. Broadhurst Estival** (France) (*spoke in French*): I congratulate Special Representative Leonardo Santos Simão on his appointment and thank him for his briefing. I wish him every success in the discharge of his mandate. He can count on the full support of France. I also welcome the participation in this meeting of the President of the Commission of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Mr. Omar Alieu Touray.

At the outset, I would like to talk about strengthening democracy in the region. France salutes the exemplary decisions of the heads of State who have made the courageous choice of a political changeover, following the example of Mahamadou Issoufou and Muhammadu Buhari. France also welcomes President Macky Sall's decision not to run in the next presidential election. Senegal is thus once again demonstrating the solidity of its long democratic tradition.

France also congratulates President Bola Tinubu, who assumed the presidency of ECOWAS a few days ago. We wish him every success in his efforts to promote peace in the region, building on the remarkable achievements of President Úmaro Sissoco Embaló.

France encourages the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel to continue its action in support of ECOWAS to ensure that this positive dynamic continues throughout the region. Elections must be held in a climate conducive to dialogue and allowing the participation and free expression of all, in particular women, journalists and human rights defenders. That is particularly important in countries where constitutional order has broken down. I would mention Burkina Faso, Guinea and Mali, which must complete their transition process and hold credible elections within the deadlines agreed with ECOWAS.

My second message concerns security. France remains committed, alongside the countries of the region, in the fight against terrorism and the strengthening of maritime security.

We closely followed the ECOWAS summit on 9 July, at which the heads of State decided to set up a presidential working group comprised of Benin, Guinea-Bissau and Nigeria to look more closely at the consequences of the end of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated

Stabilization Mission in Mali, particularly in terms of security. We, too, attach great importance to an orderly and safe withdrawal of the Blue Helmets, almost half of whom come from ECOWAS countries, and to the need for Mali to cooperate with the United Nations to that end.

France welcomes the fact that the heads of State have also requested a report on the presence of private foreign armies in the region. We share their conviction that the Wagner Group mercenaries represent a highly destabilizing threat due to the serious human rights violations they commit under the guise of fighting terrorism, their well-known strategy of plundering resources across the African continent and the incompatibility of that model with democratic institutions, guarantors of the rule of law.

On the contrary, as the Council knows, France, alongside the European Union, has long supported initiatives by countries of the region to ensure their own security. In that context, I would point to the Accra Initiative and the Group of Five for the Sahel Joint Force. With its European partners, France is also committed to doing more to support the coastal States of the Gulf of Guinea in the face of the growing terrorist threat from the Sahel.

France will be attentive to the conclusions of the ECOWAS extraordinary summit scheduled for next month in Nigeria, as well as to the recommendations of the Independent High-Level Panel on Security and Development in the Sahel, led by the former President of the Niger, Mr. Mahamadou Issoufou. There is an urgent need to support regional initiatives and enable them to benefit from United Nations funding. This is essential not only for the region, but for the security of us all.

**Ms. Evstigneeva** (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS), Mr. Leonardo Simão, as well as the President of the Commission of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Mr. Omar Touray, for their briefings.

The Head of UNOWAS and his staff are faced with truly difficult challenges, especially in view of the current situation in the Sahara-Sahel region. I wish to begin my statement by expressing our support for Mr. Simão and the entity that he heads, and we wish

him every success in his new post. We believe that the main objectives of and challenges for UNOWAS are preventive diplomacy and the provision of good offices and mediation in the resolution of conflict both in individual African countries and among them. We welcome Mr. Simão's cooperation with countries of the region as well as the priority he has set, namely, bringing together the efforts of countries of the region to counter shared challenges.

The situation in the region of Sahara-Sahel and in West Africa remains difficult, including at the security level. This is a problem that is regarded as a priority by the majority of countries in the region. The epicentre of tensions remains the border regions of Mali, Burkina Faso and the Niger, where there is increased activity by fighters from the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara and the Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin. The subversive activities of Boko Haram and Islamic State West Africa Province cells exacerbate the already difficult situation in the countries of the Lake Chad Basin. The situation remains alarming in Burkina Faso and in Chad, where, as a result of the destabilization in the Sudan, the influx of refugees has significantly grown, which has worsened domestic problems. Manifestations of terrorist activity have also been observed in the coastal West African countries of Benin, Côte d'Ivoire and Togo.

The humanitarian situation is exceedingly difficult. The number of internally displaced persons in the Sahel, as noted in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2023/490), is more than 6 million people. Some 37 million people in the region need humanitarian assistance to one degree or another. It is clear that States of the region need to step up cooperation in order to surmount the humanitarian consequences of the instability.

Evidently, the attempts by countries of the European Union (EU) to facilitate stabilization in the Sahel have not been crowned with success. On the contrary, as a result of the unilateral termination of the activities of the French Operation Barkhane and the EU's Takuba Task Force in Mali, and subsequently in the Sahara-Sahel region as a whole, terrorist threats in the region have only escalated. The repercussions of the campaign in Libya, carried out by Western countries in violation of Security Council decisions, continue to be felt. Despite all of that, Western countries continue to interfere in the domestic affairs of countries of the Sahel on all fronts. The announcement by the representative of France that someone is plundering African resources

sounds completely unacceptable, especially in the light of the French colonialist history in the region, as well as in the light of the fact that the well-being of many European countries, including France, was dependent specifically on the plundering of such resources.

A difficult situation has unfolded around the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) after 10 years of its work in Mali. We met with understanding the decision by the transitional authorities of the Republic of Mali, announced at the 16 June meeting of the Security Council (see S/PV.9350), to independently deliver safety and security to the people in their country, calling for the withdrawal of MINUSMA, whose mandate terminated at the end of June. We believe that the decisions on which political tasks will be transferred from the Mission to UNOWAS need to be made in close cooperation with Bamako. The Malian authorities continue spare no effort to restore the country to constitutional order in accordance with the modalities set by ECOWAS. In particular, on 18 June, a referendum was held on a new constitution. Preparations are under way for the implementation of further elements of the agreed electoral cycle.

We also note the elections that were held in a number of other countries in the region. Respect for democratic standards in West African and the Sahel largely hinges on the security situation in the region. Stabilization in the situation there, in turn, depends on the situation in Mali, whose authorities in early 2023 redoubled their efforts to counter illegal armed groups, and they have already achieved certain successes in this regard. Clearly, given the worsening terrorist threat, we should meaningfully help the Malians and not to hinder their efforts.

We welcome the decisions of the leaders of ECOWAS designed to establish cooperation with countries in transitional periods. We also welcome the planned visits of the President of Benin to Mali, Burkina Faso and Guinea. We trust that equitable and respectful dialogue through ECOWAS will help reconcile differences, restore trust and promote cooperation in the region. We call on countries outside the region to facilitate these contacts and refrain from steps that may undermine this process. I refer, first and foremost, to the spillover effects into this already volatile region of geopolitical frictions linked to the highly territorial posture of Western countries with regard to the development of cooperation between States of the region and the



Russia Federation. In principle, we believe that the main role in the maintenance of peace and security in the region falls upon the States of the region, and the international community should provide those States with meaningful assistance to that end.

The Russian Federation will continue to participate constructively, including as a permanent member of the Security Council, and contribute to collective efforts aimed at upholding security in the Sahara-Sahel region and in West Africa, with a key focus on implementation of the “African solutions for African problems” principle. We will continue to deliver bilateral support to States of that continent, including by enhancing the military capabilities of the armed forces, training military and law-enforcement personnel and delivering assistance of a humanitarian nature. All of the foregoing is absolutely in line with the applicable international legal norms and is welcomed by the countries of the region.

**Mr. Moretti (Brazil):** I thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Leonardo Simão, and the President of the Commission of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Mr. Omar Touray, for their briefings and work for West Africa and the Sahel. On behalf of Brazil, I wish Mr. Simão every success in his new functions and assure him of my Government’s support.

We have carefully examined the most recent report of the Secretary-General on the situation in West Africa and the Sahel (S/2023/490). As a nation deeply committed to the prevention and peaceful resolution of conflicts, we commend the efforts of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) in fostering preventive diplomacy, the exercise of good offices and advancing political mediation and facilitation across the region. We also commend the Office’s emphasis on partnerships with such regional and subregional organizations as the African Union, ECOWAS and the African Development Bank. Brazil fully endorses and promotes this approach, as it holds the potential for critical synergies and helps to enable African solutions for African problems.

Delving a little bit into the report’s updates, we draw attention to three key areas.

First, Brazil welcomes the resilience of democratic governance in various countries in the region and the successful conduct of elections. Political participation under the rule of law is critical.

Secondly, however, we echo the concerns expressed regarding the shrinking of the political space in some countries in the region. The deterioration of the security situation due to the persistence of terrorism is also quite disturbing, and reminds us of the need for long-term, comprehensive and well-coordinated efforts to fight and defeat that scourge in a sustained manner. The Security Council must support such endeavours. At the same time, it is encouraging to see improvements in the Lake Chad basin region and in maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea. As a founding member of the Zone of Peace and Cooperation of the South Atlantic, Brazil attaches great importance to security in the Gulf of Guinea and seeks to contribute to it. We stand ready to further assist efforts to combat piracy such as bolstering cooperation among navies in the region and reinforcing the Yaoundé Architecture.

Thirdly, we are concerned about the persistent humanitarian crisis in several parts of the region, marked by violence, displacement and food insecurity. The figure of 6.3 million people displaced is staggering. Addressing that critical situation requires the combined efforts of all the countries concerned in the region, supported by the international community and in line with the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel.

In conclusion, Brazil reiterates its full support to UNOWAS as it carries out essential work in its extensive area of operations. We remain willing to work alongside all the members of the Security Council as we help the region strive for peace, stability and sustainable development in all of its countries.

**The President:** I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of the United Kingdom.

Let me start by congratulating Special Representative Simão on his appointment and by thanking him and the President of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Commission, Mr. Touray, for their briefings. I will make three points, focusing on democracy, security and humanitarian issues.

First, while welcoming the democratic progress that has been made in parts of the region, the United Kingdom is concerned about the democratic uncertainty and the shrinking civic space in some countries. The progress towards the restoration of constitutional Governments in Mali, Burkina Faso and Guinea has been too slow. We need to redouble our collective efforts to hold transitional Administrations to account

on election timetables. We urge the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) to continue supporting countries in the conduct of free and fair elections, and we note with concern the recent election discrepancies in Sierra Leone.

Secondly, we remain concerned about the Sahel region's deteriorating security situation and instability, including the risk of it spreading to the coastal States. We look forward to the Secretary-General's forthcoming transition plan for the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali, including as to how UNOWAS can support Mali's transition and the Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali.

The United Kingdom remains committed to protecting civilians' rights. That is why we are concerned about the damage being done by the Russian mercenary Wagner Group across the region. Its track record proves that it has not delivered long-term security and indeed that it cannot. From Mali to Ukraine, and even in Russia itself, all that the Wagner Group offers is chaos and destruction, and it is civilians who suffer most. Now that President Putin has acknowledged that the Wagner Group is funded by the Russian State after years of denial, we call on Russia to hold accountable those responsible for human rights abuses, rapes and killings.

We welcome increased regional security coordination, including through the Accra Initiative. We encourage efforts that provide coordinated and targeted

support, including those that are complementary to wider regional initiatives. The United Kingdom is also reinforcing African security through its contributions to multilateral peacekeeping and conflict prevention, our bilateral security partnerships, including with Ghana and Nigeria, and bilateral humanitarian and development funding.

Thirdly, the humanitarian situation in the Sahel remains dire, including pockets of famine in Burkina Faso. It is essential to ensure that humanitarian actors are allowed safe and unimpeded access. As we have heard today, the humanitarian and security challenges are exacerbated by climate change.

In conclusion, we look forward to continuing to work in partnership with UNOWAS and ECOWAS to help address those complex regional challenges and build regional peace and security. We join other members in calling for the adoption of a presidential statement to underpin our support for UNOWAS's mission.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers. I invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

*The meeting rose at 11.35 a.m.*