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Seventy-eighth year

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Monday, 28 August 2023, 10 a.m.

New York

President: Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield (United States of America)

Members:

Albania	Ms. Dautllari
Brazil	Mr. França Danese
China	Mr. Dai Bing
Ecuador	Mr. Montalvo Sosa
France	Mrs. Broadhurst Estival
Gabon	Mrs. Ngyema Ndong
Ghana	Mr. Agyeman
Japan	Mrs. Shino
Malta	Ms. Gatt
Mozambique	Mr. Fernandes
Russian Federation	Mr. Polyanskiy
Switzerland	Mr. Hauri
United Arab Emirates	Mrs. Alhefeiti
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Mr. Kariuki

Agenda

The situation in Mali

Letter dated 18 August 2023 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2023/611)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Mali

Letter dated 18 August 2023 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2023/611)

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of Mali to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mr. El-Ghassim Wane, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali, and Ms. Beatrice Abouya, Acting Regional Director of Search for Common Ground.

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/2023/611, which contains the text of a letter dated 18 August 2023 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council.

I now give the floor to Mr. Wane.

Mr. Wane (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank you, Madam President, for the opportunity to update the Security Council today on the progress made in the withdrawal of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) following the 30 June decision to terminate its mandate, as requested by the Malian authorities. My remarks are intended to complement the Secretary-General's letter of 18 August (S/2023/611).

Immediately after the adoption of resolution 2690 (2023), which called for the withdrawal of the Mission to be completed by 31 December, MINUSMA, in coordination with the Secretariat, established an integrated working group to prepare a plan for the Mission's drawdown and withdrawal. The plan provides for the withdrawal and repatriation of the personnel and equipment deployed in MINUSMA's areas of operation according to a precise timetable and a specific

sequence, while taking into account the need for an orderly process to be conducted in complete safety.

(*spoke in English*)

Given the central importance of cooperation with the Malian authorities in ensuring that the undertaking is conducted efficiently, I met with the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Mali on 3 July to discuss the requirements for a safe and orderly process. Subsequently, coordination mechanisms, consisting of representatives from both the transitional Government and MINUSMA, were put in place at the technical and political levels to coordinate all aspects of the withdrawal and to ensure that the 31 December deadline is respected. I commend the Malian authorities for the cooperation and support they have extended so far.

Closing a mission built over a decade in a period of six months is a complex and ambitious endeavour. In concrete terms, it entails the repatriation of 12,947 uniformed personnel, the separation of 1,786 civilian staff, the repatriation or relocation of a load of approximately 5,500 sea containers of contingent- and United Nations-owned equipment and almost 4,000 vehicles, as well as the closure and handover of 12 camps and one temporary operating base to the Malian civilian authorities. The task is made even more challenging by a host of other constraints linked to geography, climate, logistics and infrastructure. To that, one should add the serious risks associated with the prevailing security situation.

As outlined in the Secretary-General's letter, the drawdown and closure of the Mission is unfolding in two phases: the period through 31 December; and, following that, the liquidation period, which will begin on 1 January 2024.

The first phase of the programme and withdrawal began on 17 July, focusing on the closure of the outposts that are smallest and furthest from our supercamps in Timbuktu, Gao and Mopti and shrinking our geographical footprint by 25 per cent. On 25 August — a few days ago — we completed that first phase with the closure of the Ménaka base. Earlier this month, we successively closed the temporary operating base in Ogossagou, in the Bandiagara region of central Mali, as well as the camps in Ber and Goundam, in the Timbuktu region.

The departure of MINUSMA from each of those camps was accompanied by the signing, with the designated civilian representatives of the Malian

authorities, of documents that attest to the state of the vacated camps and the fulfilment of the Mission's environmental obligations. In that respect, I would like to emphasize that the Mission is making all reasonable efforts to complete environmental remediation and the removal of hazardous materials prior to returning premises to the authorities, in spite of serious time constraints and the progressive reduction of the security umbrella under which we are operating.

In addition, negotiations are under way to finalize an overarching framework agreement that will spell out the obligations of the two parties in line with the relevant United Nations instruments and policies.

(spoke in French)

Significant progress has been made to date, and we remain on track to close the Mission by 31 December 2023. However, there have been difficulties in implementing the first phase of the withdrawal plan.

In that connection, our experience with the closure of Ber camp was revealing. The final convoy of peacekeepers, equipment and materials that left Ber to return to Timbuktu took 51 hours to cover the 57-kilometre route, owing to the unfavourable terrain — a situation exacerbated by the rainy season and overall insecurity. The convoy was attacked twice by unidentified armed elements, resulting in four peacekeepers injured and three vehicles damaged before they reached Timbuktu.

The withdrawal from Ber also proved difficult in the political sense, as the Malian authorities and the signatory movements to the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali disagreed on the fate of the camp after MINUSMA's departure. The Mission, for its part, had to bring forward its departure from the camp, which took place on 13 August instead of 15 August as initially planned, owing to the spread of the fighting to the Ber area and the risks that the situation posed for peacekeepers' safety.

Similarly, convoys carrying supplies and equipment from our bases at Goundam in the Timbuktu region and Ogossagou in central Mali were targeted by improvised explosive devices, while the final convoy from Gao to Ménaka was also targeted by unidentified armed elements. Fortunately, there was no material damage or loss of life as a result of those attacks.

With the end of the first phase, we have repatriated a total of 1,096 uniformed personnel to their respective

countries, while 79 containers of materials and equipment have already been transferred out of Mali. A further reduction in uniformed personnel is expected by the end of September. With regard to civilian staff, in accordance with the Staff Regulations and Rules of the United Nations, 291 civilian staff members, including United Nations volunteers — approximately 33 per cent of our civilian staff — will have been separated by 30 September 2023.

The second phase of the downsizing and withdrawal process, which we are now beginning, will run until 15 December 2023. It will focus on the closure of six bases: Tessalit, Aguelhok and Kidal in the north of Mali; Douentza and Mopti in the centre of the country; and Ansongo in the east. The personnel, equipment and materials concerned will be redeployed to the Timbuktu, Gao and Bamako supercamps before being repatriated to their respective countries. That phase will be extremely difficult. Convoys to evacuate personnel, equipment and materials from Tessalit, Aguelhok and Kidal to Gao, for example, will have to travel 563 kilometres in each direction for Tessalit; 415 kilometres for Aguelhok; and 352 kilometres for Kidal. At least 1,050 trucks will be needed to transport all the equipment and materials belonging to the contingents and those belonging to the United Nations. In addition to that is the fact that the terrain is difficult and insecurity omnipresent.

As well as security concerns, there are logistical constraints on the withdrawal of materials and equipment from Timbuktu. We will not be able to transport more than six containers a day using barges on the Niger River during the navigable months, which run from August to November each year. With such limitations, withdrawing as planned the 2,000 loads from Timbuktu to transit zones abroad will require the identification of additional routes.

The situation in the Niger is also having an impact on our withdrawal plan, which relies on the use of the Cotonou and Lomé transit zones. It is essential that we are able to transport equipment and materials through the Niger to those ports for subsequent repatriation to the troop- and police-contributing countries concerned.

In addition to logistical and security constraints, the closure of MINUSMA also has a political dimension. That was to be expected, given that the Mission's presence in the northern outposts contributed to the signatory parties' compliance with the ceasefire and security arrangements, while also supporting

the implementation of the 2015 Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation.

The withdrawal is taking place against the backdrop of the paralysis of the peace Agreement's monitoring structures, which have not met since November 2022, and by a serious lack of trust between the parties. Unsurprisingly, the parties have adopted divergent positions on the fate of the camps to be liberated by the Mission. In that respect, the transitional authorities have informed the Mission that they intend to take back all the MINUSMA camps once they have been evacuated, stressing that the peace Agreement does not abrogate the State's responsibility to assume control of its territory in order to protect the population and ensure security. The signatory movements, on the other hand, in particular the Coordination des mouvements de l'Azawad, have invoked the 2014 security arrangements to object to the deployment of Malian armed forces in the areas they control and insist on the need to operate within the framework of the peace Agreement.

In the context of resolution 2690 (2023), MINUSMA has reminded and continues to remind all stakeholders of the tight timetable for the Mission's departure and of the parameters underlying the closure of its camps, including the fact that the bases are to be legally transferred to the Malian State. In addition, the Mission continues to encourage the parties to reach an agreement in order to avoid unnecessary incidents, the consequences of which could be significant. Such incidents would indeed complicate the drawdown process, adversely affect the work of United Nations entities after the closure of the Mission and seriously compromise the prospects for resuming the implementation of the peace Agreement, which is a cornerstone of long-term stabilization in Mali. It is hardly necessary to underscore the urgency of the situation, given the very short deadline for the closure of the Mission and the limited flexibility we have in our withdrawal process.

It is encouraging to note that the parties involved are aware of the delicate nature of the process and the need to manage it carefully. In several meetings with me and Under-Secretary-General Lacroix during his visit to Mali two weeks ago, the Malian authorities stressed that they had no intention of having any confrontations with the signatory movements and underscored their commitment to dialogue, in order to resolve any problems that might arise, and to the efforts being made to that end. Similarly, the signatory

movements have expressed their readiness to resolve differences peacefully and contribute to the creation of the conditions necessary for a resumption of the peace process. It is now incumbent on all the parties to transform those expressions of goodwill into concrete measures with a view to preventing a crisis that is as dangerous as it is inopportune, and to advancing the cause of peace and reconciliation in Mali, while building on the progress made over the past eight years, including by ending the armed conflict. Leading members of the Arab and Tuareg communities in Bamako launched an initiative last week to facilitate dialogue and understanding between the signatory movements and the transitional authorities in order to prevent escalation and preserve the peace agreement.

Developments linked to the Mission's withdrawal highlight the importance of the work being done in collaboration with the transitional authorities on the transfer of the tasks previously carried out by the Mission. From 2 to 4 August, together with the Government of Mali, MINUSMA hosted a three-day round table on activities in support of the transition, the peace process, the restoration of State authority, the promotion and protection of human rights and other cross-cutting issues. Representatives of the United Nations country team, the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel, the African Union, the Economic Community of West African States and the European Union capacity-building mission in Mali attended the meeting. The aim was to better explain the work that has been done and assess the prospects and practical possibility for the Malian authorities, in particular, and, where appropriate, the United Nations country team and other stakeholders, to continue tasks carried out by MINUSMA until now. Government representatives reaffirmed that they would assume their responsibilities. Members of the United Nations country team also expressed their readiness to support the authorities, based on the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework 2020–2024, and said that they would take over some of MINUSMA's residual programmes, while stressing the need for additional resources.

Discussions are under way on how to consolidate and preserve the results achieved in support of our Malian partners, while seeking to maintain an environment conducive to long-term United Nations engagement with Mali and the wider region. However, challenges will remain, given the tight timetable for the Mission's withdrawal, as well as the immediate cessation of its

substantive mandate under resolution 2690 (2023), which has not allowed for a transition period as such. In that context, it is important to recognize that some tasks will not be able to be transferred effectively.

As MINUSMA enters its final chapter, I should not conclude without expressing my gratitude to the troop- and police-contributing countries for their remarkable commitment. I pay tribute to all our Blue Helmets, many of whom made the ultimate sacrifice for the cause of peace and stability in Mali. MINUSMA has made a tangible impact on the ground and provided invaluable support to the authorities and the people of Mali, in what has proved to be one of the most challenging peacekeeping operations ever undertaken by the United Nations.

MINUSMA is leaving Mali, but the United Nations, through its agencies, funds and programmes, will remain in the country. Their work has never been more vital than it is today. I welcome the assurances given by the Malian authorities of their commitment to ensuring the safety of United Nations personnel. I call on Member States to consider additional voluntary contributions to the United Nations country team and humanitarian actors to enable them to continue providing assistance to people in need and supporting Mali's development efforts.

The President: I thank Mr. Wane for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Abouya.

Ms. Abouya (*spoke in French*): I extend my warmest greetings to you, Madam President, and I would like to express my gratitude for the invitation and opportunity to speak to Council members today on the topic of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) and the current situation in Mali.

I am addressing the Council as someone involved in peacebuilding and as the Acting Regional Director of Search for Common Ground, a non-governmental organization that was established some 40 years ago with the goal of supporting peacebuilding efforts and social cohesion. We make long-term commitments to building healthy, safe and just societies in areas where local populations face violent conflict.

My commitment to peace is rooted in my personal experiences. I have repeatedly experienced and suffered the consequences of political conflict in my country of origin. The thoughts I want to share today

are based on the experience of my Malian colleagues and partners, but the opinions are my own. I would like to take a moment to acknowledge and salute the efforts by all — members of the military, civilians, Malians, international citizens — who have made sacrifices for the peace and prosperity of Mali. We all have a duty to honour their sacrifices in the fight for peace in defence of human dignity and in ensuring the right of every Malian to build a peaceful future. MINUSMA's withdrawal has now created an opportunity to reshape approaches and responses to the conflict. It is time for the United Nations and the Governments represented here to redouble their efforts in support of the Malian people. It will require careful planning and coordination in order to continue to protect human life and dignity and create conditions for lasting peace. To do that, we would like to propose four elements that we believe are essential.

First, any action taken must be based on a commitment to ensuring that the Mission's withdrawal does not jeopardize the efforts of the Malian authorities and MINUSMA to ensure peace and security.

Secondly, the United Nations and the international community must demonstrate creativity and flexibility in order to adapt a financing mechanism that can ensure that basic services and economic development resources remain available. That means that MINUSMA's financing for civilian and stabilization projects should be maintained in the country through mechanisms such as the Peacebuilding Fund and others so that interventions can continue in support of local communities, together with civil society both nationally and internationally.

Thirdly, we must consider how the United Nations and the international community can reinvest funding allocated to MINUSMA to continue support for building strong institutions that can ensure the rule of law.

Lastly, we recommend that civilian mediation and conflict resolution efforts be strengthened in order to establish frank dialogue, especially within local communities.

As we enter a new era in international cooperation on security in Mali, I am asking for the Council's ongoing support for the Malian people. Although it may seem far away, this international body's decisions in the coming days will have a direct impact on the lives of the Malian population. We must not lose sight of the reason for our meeting today, which is to help

the Malian people to lead prosperous lives in security. Let us keep their needs and requests at the centre of our discussions and support them in their pursuit of a better future.

I once again thank the Security Council for listening to me today, and I hope that the initiatives and decisions taken today will lead to a lasting peace for Mali and the Sahel.

The President: I thank Ms. Abouya for her briefing.

I would like to draw the attention of speakers to paragraph 22 of the note by the President of the Security Council on its working methods (S/2017/507), which encourages all participants in Council meetings to deliver their statements in five minutes or less, in line with the Security Council's commitment to making more effective use of open meetings.

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

Mrs. Broadhurst Estival (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Ms. Abouya for their briefings.

France takes note of the letter of the Secretary-General (S/2023/611) on the withdrawal of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). We pay tribute to the work done by the women and men of peace in Mali, and we pay homage to the memory of the peacekeepers who lost their lives.

The Malian transitional authorities have pledged to ensure the safe withdrawal of the Mission, with no restrictions on its movements or supplies, in full compliance with resolution 2690 (2023), and it is imperative that they respect that commitment on the ground. I recall that the status-of-forces agreement remains in force until the last MINUSMA element has left Mali.

I would also like to express our concern about the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali. The clashes in Ber, involving mercenaries from the Wagner Group, are a serious violation of the ceasefire. France calls on the parties to avoid any escalation and resume discussions under the aegis of international mediation. The United Nations must remain fully committed to supporting the agreement emanating from the Algiers process, and France would like it to have every resource necessary to that end.

The Security Council must continue to monitor the situation in Mali with extreme vigilance. We must fully support the efforts of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to ensure that the political transition is completed within the agreed time frame and allows for the democratic election of civilian authorities. We understand the concern of the countries in the region about the withdrawal of MINUSMA, as the ECOWAS Heads of State have called for in-depth reflection on its consequences.

Lastly and most important, we must remain attentive to the impact of the withdrawal on the daily lives of the Malian population, on access to humanitarian assistance and on the protection of human rights.

Mrs. Shino (Japan): I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Wane and Ms. Abouya for their insightful briefings. I also welcome the participation of the representative of Mali at this meeting.

We are at a critical juncture for the peace and stability of Mali and the Sahel region. We are already seeing the adverse impact of the hasty withdrawal of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). The deteriorating security situation around the Ber camp is deeply concerning. The 2015 Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali is the only existing framework to achieve durable peace and reconciliation and must be upheld. Japan calls on all parties to refrain from any actions that could jeopardize the Agreement.

Today I want to reiterate three points, as MINUSMA withdraws from Mali.

First, concerning the orderly and safe withdrawal of the Mission, Japan is deeply disturbed by attacks on withdrawing MINUSMA convoys and the restrictions imposed on MINUSMA, including on freedom of movement and access to their imports and exports. While recognizing the frequent consultations held at various levels on the withdrawal process, Japan reiterates its call on the Malian authorities to cooperate fully with the United Nations and stresses the need to respect all provisions of the status-of-forces agreement until the final element of MINUSMA has departed from Mali.

Secondly, with regard to the smooth and proper transfer of MINUSMA's tasks, long-term United Nations engagement in Mali is essential, and Japan commends ongoing efforts for the transfer. At the same time, we are deeply concerned to learn that some tasks

performed by the Mission may not be handed over, owing to the compressed timeline for the Mission's withdrawal. We call on the Malian authorities, the Mission, the United Nations country team, the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel and other relevant stakeholders to closely coordinate and collaborate further in the coming months.

Thirdly, with regard to the importance of adhering to international obligations, Japan notes that MINUSMA's tasks will be transferred primarily to the transitional Government. At the same time, the capacities of the United Nations to deliver humanitarian aid and support the protection of civilians and human rights will be severely affected by the Mission's rapid withdrawal. In that connection, we underscore the obligation of the Malian authorities and foreign security personnel to comply with international law, including international human rights law and international humanitarian law, in all its operations.

The deteriorating security situation in Mali and its effect on the region require closer attention by the Security Council. The Council must continue its engagement with the Malian authorities and regional actors. Safeguarding and promoting the implementation of the 2015 peace agreement and ensuring the return to constitutional order by March 2024 are crucial. Japan emphasizes the importance of the continued involvement of the entire United Nations system, including UNOWAS, and notes the call for the requisite financial and resource arrangements.

I conclude by reaffirming Japan's commitment to engage constructively in the discussion and to contribute to sustainable peace in Mali and beyond.

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

We welcome the multi-layered and integrated plan of withdrawal articulated by the Secretary-General for the transfer of the tasks of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) by 31 December and thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General El-Ghassim Wane for his insightful briefing on the current situation. We also thank Ms. Beatrice Abouya, the civil society briefer, for her perspective. We further welcome the participation of the Permanent Representative of Mali at this meeting.

As we very well know, the withdrawal of MINUSMA from Mali is taking place within a very short window of time and against a challenging and dynamic backdrop. Incidents of terrorist attacks against civilians and security personnel persist. The implementation of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali emanating from the Algiers process remains challenging. Misinformation and disinformation campaigns continue to complicate efforts to stabilize communities, protect civilians and provide humanitarian support to vulnerable populations. We also agree with the observation made by many that the current situation in the Niger will further complicate the security and humanitarian situation in the region and the MINUSMA liquidation process.

We nonetheless remain confident in the United Nations capacity to follow through on its objectives for a safe, orderly and coordinated withdrawal of the Mission, while preserving a United Nations long-term engagement in the country and mitigating the risk associated with the spillover effects of the crisis into neighbouring countries. We appreciate the system-wide priority that has been accorded to the drawdown and withdrawal process. We encourage the full cooperation of the Malian transitional authorities, as required under the status-of-forces agreement and resolution 2690 (2023) in support of the withdrawal of the Mission.

In the furtherance of the objectives of the withdrawal plan, the A3 would like to highlight four key points.

First, we welcome the phased implementation of the drawdown, which consolidates uniformed personnel and equipment in key camps to be followed by their repatriation. We commend the efforts already made in repatriating approximately 1,096 uniformed personnel as of today, and we stand in solidarity with the four peacekeepers who have sustained injuries during the course of the withdrawal process. Despite the challenges in the theatre, we believe a withdrawal by 31 December is still possible.

However, we note the growing tensions that have emerged between the transitional Government of Mali and one signatory movement the Coordination des mouvements de l'Azawad, as well as the uneasiness of several signatory movements. We urge the transitional authorities to renew their engagement with the signatory movements to preserve the ceasefire agreement and the commitment to the peace process.

In the light of the gaps that the withdrawal of MINUSMA would create, we urge an early solution for mechanisms for monitoring the ceasefire and monitoring and reporting on human rights. We emphasize that the stability, unity and integrity of Mali depends on the transitional authorities' capacity to carry all significant segments of the population along in an inclusive manner.

We also emphasize the important responsibility of the international mediation mechanism to hold the peace agreement in place by sustaining dialogue and coordination between the transitional Government and the signatory movements. That is essential in preserving consensus and mitigating any adverse impact that MINUSMA's withdrawal may create on the further implementation of the peace agreement. In that context, we note the concerns regarding the continuation of the measures decided by the Council for listing individuals who impair the peace process in Mali. We are, however, of the view that in the present challenging security and political situation, the measures provide a necessary safeguard for the peace agreement.

Secondly, the A3 notes the Malian transitional authorities' resolve to assume, after the withdrawal, responsibility for tasks such as the political transition and elections, support to the peace process, the restoration and extension of State authority and support to the stabilization of the centre regions, and the protection of civilians and human rights.

We also note the transitional authority's determination to restore constitutional order, in accordance with the timelines agreed with the Economic Community of West African States, and we underscore the need for the further strengthening of national institutions. We welcome the United Nations country team's readiness to work with the transitional Government to support its efforts, in line with the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework 2020–2024, and look forward to the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) playing its the good offices role for the peace process.

While recognizing the important role that UNOWAS and the United Nations country team can play in filling gaps, we note their need for adequate logistical, operational and funding support. We particularly encourage funding towards electoral support and the United Nations Development Programme basket fund to support the successful completion of the political

transition and a return to constitutional order, which would establish the basis for sustainable peace and stability in Mali.

Thirdly, in noting the challenges that the withdrawal of MINUSMA may pose for the protection of civilians, even as the Malian authorities assume full charge of their primary responsibility, the A3 re-echoes the Secretary-General's appeal for flexibility in the transfer of residual funds, as well as an increase in donor funding, to better support the authorities and the United Nations agencies to contain the multidimensional challenges Mali faces.

We remain equally worried about the deteriorating humanitarian situation arising from increasing incidents of terrorist attacks which has increased the number of people in need of humanitarian assistance to more than 5 million persons. Concerned by the widening funding gap, we urge donors to help meet the \$751.5 million target required for the humanitarian response plan. We also encourage support to relevant Malian institutions to tackle other aggravating factors on the humanitarian situation such as climate change.

Lastly, it is important, as we contemplate the legacy of MINUSMA, to prioritize measures that would sustain momentum in tackling the root causes of the crisis in Mali, including the governance and development deficits. We see value in enhancing support for the work of the Peacebuilding Commission at this critical time, including funding support to enable it to empower critical agents of change, such as women and youth, to contribute to national decision-making, conflict prevention and peaceful elections, among other areas. The role of civil society organizations also continues to be essential in support of efforts to address the political, security and humanitarian situation.

In conclusion, the A3 encourages the full cooperation of the Malian transitional authorities in authorizing and facilitating ground and air transport, as well as customs clearance, for a smooth and timely withdrawal of MINUSMA.

Gabon, Mozambique and Ghana reaffirm their common support for the plan laid out by the Secretary-General in the transfer of MINUSMA's task and believe that the timely provision of logistics and funding would be a critical element for the successful execution of the plan. We reaffirm also our respect for the sovereignty, territorial integrity and unity of Mali and underscore the need for all stakeholders to support the execution of those essential tasks.

Mr. Kariuki (United Kingdom): I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Wane for his briefing, and I pay tribute to the courage of all United Nations personnel in Mali, who continue to face constant threats. I also thank Ms. Abouya for sharing her valuable perspective with us today.

The complexity of the withdrawal of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) is unprecedented and takes place amid a deteriorating context of terrorist violence and human rights violations and abuses, including an upward trend in conflict-related sexual violence.

The Council mandated MINUSMA to conduct a safe and orderly withdrawal, with the objective of completing the process by 31 December. We continue to believe that the Council should stand ready to revise the timetable if needed. A rushed withdrawal that imperils the 2015 Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali emanating from the Algiers process and puts peacekeepers' lives at risk will have security implications for the whole region. The recent ceasefire violations in Ber demonstrate the pressing need for meaningful, structured dialogue among all parties to the peace agreement prior to the handover of MINUSMA sites, in particular in the Kidal region.

The United Nations continues to have a formal and critical role in supporting the peace agreement in Mali. We welcome the Secretary-General's transition plan, which is an important step to help guide efforts to preserve the legacy of the Mission and its achievements over the past decade.

We call on the United Nations to redouble its efforts to support meaningful consultations and mediation among all parties to the peace agreement, and we urge all parties to engage in dialogue in good faith. To deliver the United Nations ongoing role in support of the peace process, the United Kingdom supports the continued presence of a United Nations entity dedicated to supporting an inclusive peace process in Mali.

We strongly urge the transitional authorities to engage with the United Nations proposals for ongoing support for the benefit of the Malian people. The United Nations should accelerate consultations with Mali on a detailed strategy for the future of United Nations support to the peace agreement and other key tasks, including delivering on the political transition and the protection and the promotion of human rights.

Finally, as we have said before in the Security Council, the Russian mercenary group, the Wagner Group, is directly linked to human rights atrocities in Mali, including the systematic use of conflict-related sexual violence. As illustrated by recent events in Russia, they are part of the problem, not the solution, in Mali and beyond.

Mr. Dai Bing (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Wane for his briefing. I also listened carefully to the statement by the representative of the non-governmental organization. We welcome the participation of the Permanent Representative of Mali in today's meeting.

As pointed out by Special Representative Wane, the political peace process in Mali is at a critical juncture. The United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) is in the process of withdrawing from Mali. The international community should put the overall peace and stability of Mali and the region first, help Mali address challenges of all kinds and facilitate deeper cooperation between the United Nations and Mali in the new context.

I would like to highlight the following points.

First, there is a need to continue to support the political peace process in Mali.

Secretary-General Guterres recently submitted a proposal to the Security Council for a plan on the transfer of MINUSMA's tasks. The United Nations should continue to communicate fully with the Malian authorities and all other relevant parties. Any relevant plan should respect the will of Mali and be conducive to maintaining the stability of the country. At present, as it is preparing for its January elections, promoting political reform and implementing the Peace Agreement, Mali is facing many difficulties. The international community should respect Mali's sovereignty and ownership and provide constructive support based on Mali's actual needs. China encourages regional organizations, such as the Economic Community of West African States, to strengthen communication with Mali, in order to create synergies.

Secondly, China has taken note of the fact that MINUSMA is carrying out the withdrawal operation, and the Secretariat is formulating a withdrawal plan. The Mission's camps are scattered across the country, with a large number of personnel and equipment making the withdrawal task a heavy one. MINUSMA and the United Nations Secretariat should strictly implement

the mandate given by the Security Council, strengthen communication with the Malian Government and troop-contributing countries, and refine the plans for the handover of camps, withdrawal of personnel and the liquidation of assets, with a view to implementing them carefully.

Ensuring the safety and security of peacekeepers and United Nations assets is a top priority. The recent attack on the MINUSMA convoy withdrawing from the base at Ber resulted in injuries to a number of peacekeepers. MINUSMA should take this lesson seriously, adopt practical measures to improve its security capacity and make every effort to ensure the safe and orderly withdrawal of the Mission.

Thirdly, China commends the active counter-terrorism efforts of the Malian authorities. At present, the political situation in the Sahel region is volatile. Terrorist and extremist forces are taking advantage of the situation and threatening regional stability. The countries in the region should resolve their conflicts and differences and unite to meet the challenges. After the withdrawal of MINUSMA, the international community should not stand aside and do nothing with regard to efforts undertaken by Mali and other countries in the region to counter terrorism and instability. Instead, it should continue to provide support, equipment and logistics and funding in order to enhance the capacity of the Malian authorities to combat terrorism and protect civilians.

It is also necessary to continue support for the other countries of West Africa and the Sahel region in order to maintain the momentum in counter-terrorism and security cooperation, revitalizing cooperation mechanisms and maintaining common security. The focus should be on addressing the root causes of the conflict. The United Nations country team and the United Nations Development Programme and other agencies should, in accordance with their respective mandates, provide greater support in conflict reduction, development, food security and the protection of women and children. International humanitarian agencies and major donors should maintain the scale of their assistance to Mali and avoid attaching any political conditions to their assistance.

Ms. Dautllari (Albania): I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Wane for his comprehensive update on the ongoing withdrawal of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). I commend

the dedication shown by peacekeepers and personnel who have worked very hard towards fostering peace and stability in Mali over the past decade. We also thank Ms. Beatrice Abouya for her briefing.

Albania takes note of the letter of the Secretary-General outlining the plan for MINUSMA's transfer of tasks (S/2023/611) and is encouraged by the priority the United Nations has shown in managing this complex process. Allow me to focus on three key areas.

First, the importance of a safe and orderly withdrawal of personnel and peacekeepers from Mali cannot be understated. The volatile security situation, compounded by the presence of terrorist groups, presents further challenges for MINUSMA. Therefore, the Malian transition Government's unwavering cooperation is required to facilitate a withdrawal by 31 December. We are concerned by the recent hostilities in Ber and condemn the attacks against MINUSMA, which pose a significant risk to the safety and security of personnel. Albania stresses the need for coordinated mechanisms with the transition Government for the handover of tasks and sites and urges the full cooperation of signatory armed groups.

Secondly, we are deeply concerned about the fragility of the 2015 Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali. We urge parties to remain committed to implementing the Agreement and refrain from engaging in hostile activities, violating the ceasefire. As the Secretary-General highlighted, such tensions risk seriously undermining the entire peace process.

As MINUSMA departs, many gaps will be created in Mali. It is therefore crucial that the transition Government focus on advancing the political transition and making tangible gains so as to return to constitutional order, within the timelines agreed with the Economic Community of West African States, while creating the conditions for an inclusive political and civil space.

Thirdly, in the face of persistent human rights violations and abuses in Mali, we call on the transition Government to abide by its international obligations to protect civilians and carry out security operations in accordance with international humanitarian law. In this regard, the partnership with the Wagner Group raises serious concerns and will not bring any peace or stability to Mali. Similarly, the humanitarian situation is dire and will be further affected by the withdrawal of

MINUSMA. Humanitarian assistance and guaranteed access remain imperative.

In conclusion, Albania commends the United Nations for leading a swift withdrawal and stresses that United Nations and Security Council engagement in Mali remains critical. We call on the Malian authorities to fully cooperate with MINUSMA to ensure an orderly and safe withdrawal, while fully respecting the Status of Forces Agreement until the final departure.

Ms. Gatt (Malta): I also thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Wane and Ms. Abouya for their briefings.

Malta reiterates the importance of an orderly, safe and effective withdrawal of MINUSMA in accordance with resolution 2690 (2023), and we express our support for the Secretary-General and the work on the plan of transferring the Mission's tasks. We commend the swift actions already taken towards this end, while underlining the critical need to ensure the safety and security of United Nations personnel throughout the entire withdrawal process. We further emphasize that, until MINUSMA's complete departure, its freedom of movement in accordance with the Status of Forces Agreement is not negotiable. Access to any imports and exports required by the Mission for its withdrawal should not be restricted in any way.

Malta remains deeply concerned about the vacuum that may arise in the context of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali, in particular the impact that MINUSMA's withdrawal will have on its implementation. We call upon the Malian transition Government and parties to the Agreement to revive diplomatic efforts in a bid to avoid further confrontation. We expect full cooperation from Mali in safeguarding the Peace Agreement, while also welcoming discussions between the Secretariat, the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS), international mediation and regional organizations on the new role of UNOWAS within the Agreement Monitoring Committee. We also call on all parties to the Agreement to respect the ongoing withdrawal process and refrain from committing any acts that could jeopardize United Nations personnel during this delicate stage. We denounce the recent incidents in Ber earlier this month and call for unity, peace and stability.

Malta strongly condemns all human rights abuses and violations of international humanitarian law. Preventing and responding to conflict-related

sexual violence and grave violations against children must be given priority. We urge the Malian transition Government to enhance protection for women and children, especially in central and northern Mali and to accelerate the implementation of the joint communiqué and action plan to prevent and respond to conflict-related sexual violence. We also call for the swift adoption and implementation of a joint plan to prevent all six grave violations against children.

We recognize and appreciate the efforts of the United Nations country team and other United Nations bodies in supporting the transfer of monitoring and reporting tasks in relation to the protection of women and children. At the same time, we underline the critical need for the Malian authorities to work together with the United Nations system to ensure the protection of civilians and to monitor, report and evaluate the human rights situation in the country.

We support UNOWAS and the United Nations country team in taking on tasks previously under MINUSMA's mandate and acknowledge the need for additional financing and resources to properly fulfil those functions.

In conclusion, Malta reiterates its support to MINUSMA and its dedicated personnel for their steadfast commitment over the past 10 years. The absence of MINUSMA in the country will require a renewed approach and commitment by the transition Government, including the restoration of constitutional order by March 2024, which remains central in the path towards stability and peace in the country and the region.

Malta looks forward to further updates to the Council in the coming months.

Mr. Polyanskiy (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General El-Ghassim Wane and Ms. Beatrice Abouya for their briefings.

We carefully read the letter of the Secretary-General (S/2023/611) regarding the modalities for the drawdown the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA).

We thank the United Nations Secretariat and MINUSMA staff for their efforts to implement the decisions of the Security Council in close coordination with Malian leadership. We note that the plan for the withdrawal of peacekeepers provided in the

letter is indeed within the framework established by the provisions of resolution 2690 (2023), which we supported, guided by the fact that it took into account the main concerns of the Malian side.

We stress the need for strict adherence to the deadlines set out in this document for the withdrawal of the main United Nations forces, which must be completed by 31 December. The process of the subsequent dismantling of MINUSMA's infrastructure, planned for the year and a half following the closure of the Mission must be equally streamlined. We look forward to further proposals from the Secretary-General on optimizing Mission costs until its drawdown is completed.

We understand that the Mission's withdrawal is taking place under difficult conditions, including due to the actions of terrorist groups. We condemn the attacks carried out against peacekeepers during this period and wish a speedy recovery to the wounded Burkinabe personnel.

At the same time, we note that, overall, the first phase of the implementation of resolution 2690 (2023) was completed without serious incident. We trust that the second phase of the process, due to begin on 1 September, which involves a larger-scale movement of Blue Helmets to the Gao and Bamako regions, will proceed in a similarly orderly and organized manner.

We call on all Malian parties to refrain from engaging in armed provocations or ramping up militant rhetoric during this important period for Mali. We recall that the United Nations peacekeeping Mission is authorized to transfer its infrastructure exclusively to the official authorities of the host country.

With regard to the question of the modalities for the transfer of MINUSMA's powers, in the context of the Algiers Accord, to any United Nations entities, such as the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel, we believe that any decision in that regard requires securing the consent of the Malians themselves, first and foremost.

We continue to see how Russian-Malian bilateral cooperation, carried out at the request of Bamako and in strict accordance with applicable norms of international law, as well as Mali's sovereign choice of international security partners, are keeping a number of our former Western partners up at night. They are suffering from a clear relapse of neocolonial approaches and are unable to put away their double standards.

Of course, those countries could also effectively help the Malian authorities themselves rather than doing everything to discredit their efforts to ensure security and combat terrorism. Unfortunately, these countries do not know how to cooperate with the countries of the Global South on an equal and respectful footing. We should therefore pay no heed to their colonial phantom pains.

Russia, for its part, will continue to provide Mali and other interested African partners with comprehensive assistance on a bilateral, equal and mutually respectful basis.

Mrs. Alhefeiti (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I thank Special Representative Mr. El-Ghassim Wane for his briefing on the latest developments regarding the withdrawal from Mali of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), which we believe is important to keep the Council informed of the details of that process. I also thank Ms. Beatrice Abouya for her valuable briefing and welcome the participation of the Permanent Representative of Mali in today's meeting.

We appreciate the efforts of the United Nations and its expeditious preparation of the withdrawal and handover plan in cooperation with Mali, in line with resolution 2690 (2023).

We believe that the full and effective implementation of the withdrawal plan in the coming period will be crucial to avoid any negative effects that could impede the peace process in Mali or harm the security and stability of the region and to pave the way for determining the nature of the role that the United Nations can play in future to meaningfully support Mali after the withdrawal of MINUSMA.

In the context of our discussion today, I would like to highlight three points.

First, ensuring the withdrawal of MINUSMA in an orderly and safe manner depends intrinsically on the continued cooperation and coordination among the Malian authorities, the United Nations and all other parties concerned. The United Arab Emirates stresses the importance of continuing ongoing consultations among all parties to ensure a smooth handover of tasks and the removal of any obstacles that could hinder the implementation process, thus contributing to protecting the gains made by Malians, MINUSMA and other international partners.

With the commencement of the withdrawal process and gradual closure of MINUSMA camps and the transfer of its functions to the Government of Mali, it is important to ensure the safe delivery of MINUSMA camps and equipment in accordance with United Nations procedures and mutual obligations with Mali. In that context, emerging concerns must be addressed in order to avoid any security incidents such as those that preceded the withdrawal of MINUSMA from the camp in Ber. We stress the need to pursue and strengthen proactive risk planning in order to ensure the safety of peacekeepers and civilians.

In a related context, the seriousness of misleading and wrong information must not be ignored and should be addressed through the strengthening of the Mission's strategic communications with the actors concerned and its continued communication with local population.

Secondly, focus must remain on the protection and safety of civilians, as the Mission's withdrawal comes at a time when civilians in Mali and the Sahel region, as a whole, are suffering from threats of violence from terrorist groups and other security challenges. Therefore, their protection must remain one of the main priorities of all parties concerned, and we trust that the Malian authorities will do their utmost in that regard.

MINUSMA's withdrawal also coincides with growing humanitarian needs. According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, such needs have increased by 17 per cent since last year. We are therefore encouraged that the United Nations team will remain in Mali to continue supporting local communities. In that connection, the United Arab Emirates supports the efforts of the United Nations humanitarian and development teams to restructure their presence in Mali.

Thirdly, reiterated commitment to dialogue is essential for the implementation of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali, which remains essential for achieving the desired stability in Mali. The United Arab Emirates therefore urges all parties to reaffirm their commitment to resuming a meaningful dialogue as the most effective way to resolve differences and de-escalate tensions. It also provides an opportunity to build confidence and contributes to the revival of the Local Follow-up Committee of the Transition in Mali and other mechanisms responsible for ensuring the full implementation of the agreement. In that regard, we reaffirm our support for international mediation efforts.

For its part, the United Arab Emirates continues to call for progress in the political transition, including the upcoming electoral processes agreed with the Economic Community of West African States. We look forward to the role that the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel will play in supporting the political process in Mali.

In conclusion, the United Arab Emirates affirms its support for all regional and international efforts aimed at helping Mali achieve peace and stability.

Mr. Montalvo Sosa (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Mr. El-Ghassim Wane, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) and Ms. Beatrice Abouya, Acting Regional Director of Search for Common Ground, for their briefings.

As we have heard this morning, the Secretary-General's letter (S/2023/611) is clear: the withdrawal of MINUSMA, requested by the transitional Government, will leave gaps in important areas of the work that the Mission had been carrying out, especially with regard to the implementation of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali.

In that regard, my delegation would like to highlight three points.

First, we must ensure that increased financial support is provided to the United Nations country team and regional offices, which will be assuming a significant part of the Mission's responsibilities. One of the most important of those responsibilities, which will clearly require the support of the transitional Government, will be to ensure the political and electoral transition process. That will fall to the United Nations Development Programme, which will ensure the continuity of the process. In that context, we are pleased to see that the plan for the Mission's withdrawal contains options that would work to that effect.

Secondly, many of MINUSMA's functions will have to be assumed by the transitional Government in a comprehensive manner. The most important of those functions is the protection of civilians, which is being and should be carried out within the framework of international law, human rights and international humanitarian law. Compliance with those norms is essential. We call for the continuation of humanitarian efforts, especially demining activities.

Thirdly, it is essential for the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel to replace the role of MINUSMA with regard to issues of conflict-prevention policy and mediation in order to ensure the continuity of the peace agreement among all the actors concerned. In that regard, we call on Algeria, as leader of the international mediation process, as well as the African Union and the Economic Community of West African States, to provide the necessary support for the parties to engage in a constructive dialogue aimed at the full implementation of the peace agreement, in particular respect for the ceasefire during MINUSMA's withdrawal, in order to prevent attacks such as the one that occurred on 13 August in the area of Ber, which forced the early departure of the Mission owing to the lack of security.

Ecuador joins others in urging the transitional Government to honour and respect the status-of-forces agreement that remains in force until the last element of MINUSMA leaves Mali and to ensure an orderly and safe withdrawal in which the freedom of movement of personnel and goods is permitted at all stages of the Mission's withdrawal. At this juncture, MINUSMA's strategic communications are increasingly important as a means for combating disinformation and safeguarding its personnel.

Finally, I call for the flow of humanitarian aid necessary to nearly 6 million people not to stop. In addition, it is vital to strengthen efforts in preventing and responding to sexual violence and protecting children in armed conflict. The people of Mali need our support today more than ever.

Mr. França Danese (Brazil): I thank Special Representative El-Ghassim Wane for his comprehensive briefing. It is critical for the Security Council to be kept fully updated on the situation in Mali as the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) transfers its tasks and prepares to leave the country. I also thank Ms. Abouya for her briefing. I recognize the presence of the delegation of Mali at today's meeting.

I also thank the Secretary-General for his letter (S/2023/611) on the main aspects of the transfer of tasks of MINUSMA to the Government of Mali. The document is very helpful, as it addresses issues key not only to the safe removal of the Mission's personnel and equipment, but also to the stabilization of Mali.

We deplore the acts of violence against MINUSMA personnel during its withdrawal from the Ber camp earlier in August. Let us be clear on this point — any act committed against a peacekeeper is an act that hurts the entire United Nations and everything it stands for, and those responsible must be held accountable.

Brazil welcomes the engagement with the Malian authorities aimed at ensuring that proper support continues to be provided to the country in its political transition and its efforts towards the conclusion of the peace process. The successful implementation of both tracks is essential for ensuring the full control of the country's territory by Malian authorities and their capacity to help to ensure MINUSMA's safe drawdown and withdrawal.

Brazil also reiterates its support to the mediation process led by Algeria and urges all Malian political forces to engage in dialogue and resume the implementation of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali. We also express our appreciation for the strategy outlined for strengthening the good offices and mediation mandates of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel, the Economic Community of West African States and the African Union. We believe that bilateral and regional arrangements play a crucial role in performing preventive diplomacy and conflict resolution.

Brazil is concerned about the worsening humanitarian situation in Mali. No less than 8.8 million people are expected to need assistance this year, according to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. It is imperative that all those concerned allow for and support unimpeded and safe humanitarian assistance to them. We are particularly concerned about the conditions of vulnerable groups, especially women and children. MINUSMA's withdrawal should not lead to diminished assistance for those people. Brazil hopes that the transfer of tasks by MINUSMA will be conducted in a safe manner, with full cooperation with and by the Malian authorities, in accordance with the agreed plan.

Mr. Hauri (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General El-Ghassim Wane and Ms. Beatrice Abouya for their briefings.

The withdrawal of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) is of an unprecedented scope and

complexity, and we appreciate the priority that the United Nations has given to its planning, which involves various components of the United Nations system. We support the objectives identified by the Secretary-General, such as ensuring the safety and security of personnel, safeguarding the Mission's achievements and preserving an environment conducive to fulfilling the United Nations long-term efforts in Mali. The withdrawal plan is ambitious, and the stakes for Mali are high.

I would like to highlight three points.

First, the safety and security of MINUSMA personnel must be ensured. The events in Ber a few weeks ago and other cases in which MINUSMA was directly attacked have demonstrated the extent of the Mission personnel's vulnerability and the threats they face. Unfortunately, the risks to personnel are expected to increase — and even more so as the disinformation campaigns against MINUSMA are adopting new narratives. We therefore welcome the measures presented by the Secretary-General with regard to strategic communication. Beyond MINUSMA's withdrawal, we support maintaining a dedicated guard unit that is adequately equipped and trained to respond to the risks that the personnel in charge of the Mission's closure phase could face. We are counting on the support of the Malian Armed Forces to protect the surroundings of the remaining United Nations infrastructure, and that includes ensuring the safety of the guard unit.

Secondly, the implementation of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali remains more crucial and urgent than ever. In that context, we are concerned about the rise in tensions between the transitional Government and the Coordination des mouvements de l'Azawad related to the imminent withdrawal of MINUSMA. Nine years of work, dialogue and efforts towards national reconciliation are at stake — first and foremost for the Malian people, but also for the region and the entire international community. Switzerland shares the Secretary-General's analysis that confidence-building measures are essential to getting the peace process back on track. We also stress that any violation of the ceasefire could hamper a resumption of the peace process. In order to support the international mediation efforts to implement the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation, the question arises of the relevance of setting up a support mechanism with adequate resources and preferably a permanent presence on the ground. Any consideration of the matter should be coordinated

with the Malian authorities, the other signatories to the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation and those involved in the international mediation.

Thirdly, the discussions on the transfer and resumption of MINUSMA's multiple tasks should lead to concrete proposals by the end of the year. We urge all the parties to do their best to reach an agreement. The Secretary-General has already made some concrete suggestions. For example, Switzerland supports the transfer of political tasks to the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) and is ready to contribute to discussions on the subject. We are also aware that certain activities previously carried out by MINUSMA cannot be transferred, which will have consequences for the protection of civilians and the supply of humanitarian aid, among other things. We welcome all measures taken to minimize the impact of MINUSMA's withdrawal on the population and to better respond to humanitarian needs. We also note that none of the organizations mentioned in the Secretary-General's letter (S/2023/611), including UNOWAS, the United Nations country team and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, have resources adequate to taking on additional tasks, and budget adjustments would therefore be necessary.

In conclusion, I would like to thank MINUSMA and all its staff, as well as the Secretariat in New York, for their commitment and efforts since 1 July to ensure a safe and orderly withdrawal. The most important and difficult tasks still lie ahead. We call on all actors to cooperate with MINUSMA so that its withdrawal can be implemented according to plan and in complete safety and security.

Finally, we hope that the Council can provide the necessary support and guidance as the process continues, based on the Secretary-General's information on important developments.

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

Let me start by thanking Special Representative Wane for his briefing and for his leadership during an extremely challenging time for Mali and for the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). I also thank Ms. Abouya for her briefing and recommendations in support of the Malian people and welcome the participation in this meeting of the Permanent Representative of Mali.

As many of us feared, the transition Government's decision to close MINUSMA has already triggered renewed violence on the ground. We are alarmed by a resumption of hostilities in northern Mali, including violations of the ceasefire during the clashes on 11 and 12 August at the Ber camp and by subsequent attacks on a MINUSMA convoy on 13 August. In addition, MINUSMA's withdrawal limits the ability of the international community to protect civilians from the predations of the Wagner Group, whose activities contribute to greater insecurity in the country.

We are deeply grateful to the men and women of MINUSMA and to the troop- and police-contributing countries for their commitment to peace in Mali in the face of grave danger. We strongly condemn the senseless attacks on peacekeepers, which threaten to reverse years of progress toward peace and stability and undo so many of the remarkable gains made by the United Nations and by Malians. Let me be clear. If war were to break out, it would again unleash unspeakable, unthinkable devastation on the Malian people, who have already endured so much needless suffering. The Malian people deserve peace. Further instability would open the doors to Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin and the Islamic State — Sahel Province to spread their access and influence. It would be a recipe for disaster. The Malian transition Government and signatory armed groups, along with the United Nations and the international community, must demonstrate an urgent and revitalized commitment to the Algiers accords. That agreement continues to represent the best opportunity for lasting peace and stability in Mali, plain and simple. To that end, we call on all the signatory parties to immediately renew their cooperation with the international mediation.

The United States welcomes the Secretary-General's plan outlining the transfer of some of MINUSMA's tasks, and we strongly urge the United Nations to provide concrete recommendations for transferring Mission tasks associated with the Algiers accords to avoid significant delays in their implementation. The establishment of a dedicated component within the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel may be the most prudent way to ensure continuity in that regard. In the light of this month's dangerous events surrounding MINUSMA's forced withdrawal at Ber, MINUSMA should remain engaged with all parties on the Algiers accords while drawdown activities continue. The United States also urges the parties to settle their disputes through dialogue and engage

with MINUSMA on an agreement for the safe and peaceful transfer of its camps and bases to the Malian authorities. As the situation grows increasingly volatile, those transfers must prioritize the safety and security of peacekeepers. All parties must refrain from any action that jeopardizes MINUSMA's safe and orderly withdrawal or endangers United Nations personnel. I also want to remind the transition authorities that the status-of-forces agreement and its provisions ensuring MINUSMA's freedom of movement throughout Mali remain in full effect until the Mission's final elements have departed, which will extend beyond 31 December.

The transitional Government has so far cooperated with the Mission's withdrawal, which is notable despite the challenges it has already endured, but it must continue to do so. I will say once again how regrettable the decision to end MINUSMA's presence in Mali was, but that is water under the bridge. Mali's leaders now have an opportunity to build on MINUSMA's important legacy and recommit to dialogue to settle differences rather than violence. We urge all Malians and all Malian leaders to choose the path of peace and stability and to choose a future for the people of Mali.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I give the floor to the representative of Mali.

Mr. Konfourou (Mali) (*spoke in French*): I would like to begin by expressing my thanks for this opportunity to share with the Council the observations of the Government of Mali on the Secretary-General's progress report (S/2023/611) on the withdrawal of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). I would also like to thank Mr. El-Ghassim Wane, Head of MINUSMA, for his presentation of the report.

The Government of Mali is delighted that the Security Council acceded to the request we made in June and since then has been working in close cooperation with MINUSMA for its coordinated, secure and orderly withdrawal, in accordance with the deadline of 31 December decided by the Council. Accordingly, since the adoption of resolution 2690 (2023) on 30 June, the Government of Mali has intensified its consultations with MINUSMA at both the technical and political levels, with a view to facilitating and expediting the process of withdrawing the Mission from Malian territory.

At this point I feel compelled to express the Government of Mali's surprise at the statements in the report about flight restrictions and import limitations imposed on MINUSMA. The communication channels and working groups set up at all levels of decision-making and the direct contacts currently under way have considerably strengthened the framework for exchange between the Malian Administration and MINUSMA. Those assertions are all the more surprising given that they are factually unfounded and objectively contrary to the constructive spirit of cooperation that the Government has consistently shown towards MINUSMA and all missions dispatched by Headquarters in New York. The visits of Under-Secretaries-General Atul Khare, Jean-Pierre Lacroix and Gilles Michaud, which we must commend, are a perfect illustration of that.

With regard to our expectations, I would like to take this opportunity to remind the Council that the Government of Mali looks forward to receiving detailed information concerning the strength of the Mission and the provisional plan for the gradual closure of various MINUSMA services. Along the same lines, I would like to stress that, contrary to some parts of the report, the Government of Mali has very calmly assessed MINUSMA's withdrawal and prepared the measures necessary to address any possible related security vacuum. Indeed, I would like to recall that an objective analysis of the consequences of the withdrawal preceded Mali's carefully considered decision to request the Mission's withdrawal. Steps already taken in advance are continuing and have shown, among others, that the Malian Armed Forces are ready to address any situation, including the early handover of camps, as was the case for Ber on 13 August.

In addition, the withdrawal of MINUSMA, the mandate of which was poorly adapted to the Malian context, as has been highlighted repeatedly by several members of the Organization, is the result of a strong call from the Malian people. In that regard, the Government welcomes the implementation of the first phase of MINUSMA's withdrawal, during which four camps were handed over.

While the transfer of camps at Ogossogou, Goundam and Ménaka was peaceful, the Government deplores the incidents that have marred the return of Ber, during which armed terrorist groups took hostile action to prevent the Malian Armed Forces from occupying the camp. That incident resulted in six

deaths in our ranks, for which the Government of Mali extends its condolences on behalf of the country. At least 72 terrorist fighters were also neutralized. That again shows the determination of the Malian Armed Forces to assume their sovereign mission of defending the nation's territory and protecting the population and its property.

Mali's determination, which has ensured that the Malian army will take over all camps that will be vacated by MINUSMA, obviously does not constitute an act of belligerence or a breach of the peace process. On the contrary, it is part of the regular process of the Mission's handover of its holdings in compliance with the relevant legal framework, in particular the Algiers process agreement and all Security Council resolutions that recognize the sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of Mali.

It is important to note that our defence and security forces have been attacked by armed terrorist groups and that they have not violated the Agreement, much less the ceasefire, and have no intention of doing so. However, if our forces are attacked or are prevented from carrying out their mission, they will be forced to respond forcefully. The Government intends to continue its efforts to restore State authority throughout the nation's territory in order to ensure the safety of people and property and provide basic social services to the Malian people.

I would note that the Government reiterates its commitment to the detailed and diligent implementation of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali, in collaboration with the signatory movements that wish to do so, with a view to restoring lasting peace and stability in the country, for the benefit of our population. As I already informed the Council, today the Minister for Reconciliation, Peace and National Cohesion, tasked with peace and reconciliation in Mali, talked to representatives of the signatory movements and asked them to return to the negotiating table to overcome the current challenges through dialogue. In that communiqué, he also reaffirmed the commitment of the Malian Government to peace and reconciliation and to respect for the ceasefire agreement of 23 May 2014.

I can assure the Council that we denounce the recent collusion between the armed groups and terrorist organizations and recall that several Security Council resolutions have requested all armed groups to renounce violence and sever all ties with terrorist organizations and transnational organized crime.

Furthermore, the Government attaches considerable importance to addressing the environmental aspects of MINUSMA's withdrawal and encourages the Mission to continue, and even strengthen, measures to ensure that the Mission's environmental footprint is reduced, in particular through joint environmental assessment visits related to clean-up efforts.

In that regard, we request in particular that the containers of contaminated sand left at Ber be moved to a safe place and properly treated, in accordance with United Nations standards and the applicable national legislation. In addition, given the concerns raised about human rights monitoring and reporting in Mali, I recall that MINUSMA's withdrawal in no way diminishes the determination and commitment of the Malian authorities as it pertains to respect for and the protection of human rights, which are a valuable part of our glorious history and a key value of our society.

The second phase of the transfer of MINUSMA installations to the Government of Mali, which will begin on 1 September, must be carried out according to the agreed timetable. Insofar as we are open to peacefully discussing and resolving specific issues that may arise, we are also committed to strict compliance with the deadlines agreed for the transfer of the Tessalit, Aguelhok and Kidal camps to the Malian State. I would like to recall that the Government of Mali does not envisage extending the deadline for MINUSMA's departure beyond 31 December, as set out in resolution 2690 (2023).

MINUSMA's withdrawal does not mean the end of cooperation between the Republic of Mali and the United Nations. Mali remains a full-fledged member of the United Nations and, as such, the Government intends to continue its cooperation with the programmes, funds and agencies of the United Nations system already present in Mali, including by continuing to ensure their safety, as those bodies carry out remarkable work on the ground.

Concerning the future role of the United Nations in the peace process in Mali and in accordance with the vision of His Excellency Colonel Assimi Goïta, President of the Transition and Head of State, who intends to strengthen national ownership of the process,

the Government of Mali wishes to prioritize direct intra-Malian dialogue. It can allow our people to find within it the momentum and dynamic compromises necessary for social cohesion and national reconciliation.

In that constructive spirit, Mali wishes to give confidence-building measures another chance. In that regard, I reiterate the request of the Government of Mali to lift the sanctions regime, in accordance with the letter dated 15 August addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2023/605, annex).

After more than 10 years of crisis, with particularly disastrous consequences for our population, the people of Mali want to put an end to the conflict. That is why they are requiring the Government to prioritize sustainable domestic solutions. They are sceptical of external recommendations, which have, at times, been made in good faith and at other times come with various agendas, and which have maintained or prolonged the crisis instead of resolving it over the long term.

Before concluding, I reiterate the commitment of the Government of Mali, which has already been expressed during visits by United Nations Secretariat officials, to successfully completing the liquidation phase, which we would like to see reduced to a bare minimum. As MINUSMA withdraws from Mali, I am pleased to commend the efforts and, at times, the sacrifices that have been made by United Nations personnel in helping Mali to achieve peace and stability.

I pay tribute to the memory of all the victims of the Malian crisis, civilians and soldiers alike, Malians and foreigners — all those who lost their lives in Mali. I assure the Council that the Government will spare no effort to identify and bring to justice the perpetrators of criminal acts against our civilians, forces and United Nations personnel. I extend my sincere gratitude to all of Mali's friends, bilateral and multilateral, for their considerable support for our efforts to end the crisis and pursue development.

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

The meeting rose at 11.40 a.m.