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Activities of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel

Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. The present report covers the period from 1 July to 30 November 2024. It contains an overview of developments and trends in West Africa and the Sahel and the activities of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS), as well as progress in the implementation of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel, and an update on the situation in the Lake Chad basin, pursuant to Security Council resolution [2349 \(2017\)](#).

II. Developments and trends in West Africa and the Sahel

2. The political environment continued to be marked by uncertainty about political transition timelines in countries that experienced unconstitutional changes of government. Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger held the first summit of Heads of State of the Alliance of Sahel States in Niamey on 6 July, at which they announced the establishment of a confederation and reiterated that their departure from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) was “irrevocable”. By contrast, Guinea affirmed that it would remain within the Community.

3. Electoral campaigns intensified in Ghana, where the key contenders for the general election on 7 December pledged fiscal stability, job creation, economic transformation and growth, and in Senegal, which held legislative elections on 17 November, while the legislative elections in Guinea-Bissau were postponed. Preparations were under way in Cabo Verde for local elections in December 2024 and in Côte d’Ivoire for the presidential election in 2025. Constitutional reform processes were ongoing in several countries. In the Gambia, the gazetting of a modified draft constitution reopened public debate on the process, notably on the issue of presidential executive powers. Togo proceeded with the implementation of its revised Constitution, while in Sierra Leone there was a renewed spirit of engagement and solidarity, demonstrated by the good faith implementation of the Agreement for National Unity of October 2023 and the recommendations of the Tripartite Committee.

4. Central Sahel continued to grapple with complex challenges, including insecurity, political instability, humanitarian crises, environmental degradation and socioeconomic hardship. The security situation remained highly volatile, mainly due



to the activities of terrorist and other non-State armed groups, which exploit local grievances and instability to recruit members and launch military operations. Despite progress by the Multinational Joint Task Force in the Lake Chad basin, strained relations among some countries and a lack of consensus on the region's security architecture, compounded by geopolitical dynamics, impeded effective collaboration in tackling the wider threats posed by terrorism and transnational organized crime.

5. Recent widespread flooding, especially in Ghana, Liberia, Mali, the Niger and Nigeria, exacerbated security and humanitarian challenges, further undermining livelihoods and complicating humanitarian responses.

A. Politics and governance

6. In Benin, a former minister, a local businessman and the commander of the Republican Guard were arrested on 24 September for allegedly planning a military coup. On 2 October, two of them were charged with "conspiracy against State security, corruption of public funds and money-laundering" and remanded in custody. In anticipation of the 2026 general elections and against the backdrop of electoral tensions during the 2021 presidential election, some civil society groups, including the *Cadre de concertation des confessions religieuses*, called for a consensual review of the electoral code of March 2024 to ensure a free, transparent and inclusive electoral process in 2026.

7. In Burkina Faso, a new transition charter extended the mandate of the transitional President, Colonel Ibrahim Traoré, for an additional five years. The suspension in 2022 of political party and civil society activities remained in place. On 23 September, the transitional authorities announced that they had foiled a destabilization attempt allegedly involving civilians and military personnel residing in the Central African Republic and Côte d'Ivoire. The authorities listed 14 persons who were allegedly involved, including the former transitional President, Lieutenant-Colonel Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba, and the former Minister for Foreign Affairs, Djibril Bassolé, and announced that several people had been arrested. On 11 July, Colonel Traoré accused neighbouring countries of hosting third-country military bases to destabilize Burkina Faso.

8. In Cabo Verde, following consultations with political parties, local elections were set for 1 December 2024.

9. In Côte d'Ivoire, in preparation for the presidential election in October 2025, the Independent Electoral Commission conducted a review of the voters list from 19 October to 10 November, following the installation of local electoral commissions between 22 July and 2 August. On 9 August, 10 opposition political parties and two civil society organizations established a joint platform calling for an inclusive dialogue on the electoral process. They also requested an extension to the duration of the voters list update and called for a revision of the electoral boundaries as well as the reform of the Independent Electoral Commission. A presidential decree was issued granting an extension for voter registration. As a result, the registration period was extended by one week.

10. In the Gambia, a revised version of the 2020 draft constitution was gazetted on 14 August, for deliberation by Parliament. Opposition parties and civil society organizations criticized the significant amendments. Among other things, the gazetted version does not address the timing of the retroactive clause on presidential term limits. It strengthens presidential executive prerogatives, removes parliamentary oversight and confirmation of appointments to key government and independent institutions, reintroduces the presidential power to nominate five members of Parliament, in accordance with the current 1997 Constitution, and strengthens other

presidential executive prerogatives by empowering the President to override the five-year term of Parliament, dissolve it at will and call for early elections. The draft also halved the number of seats reserved for women in Parliament from 14 to 7.

11. In Ghana, preparations are under way for general elections on 7 December. On 20 September, the Electoral Commission approved 13 presidential candidates (9 from political parties and 4 independent candidates), including two women, out of 24 aspirants. This number was subsequently reduced to 12 due to the death of one female candidate and the party's inability to field a replacement, which leaves only one female candidate, down from three in 2020. On 1 October, a meeting of the Inter-Party Advisory Committee, convened by the Electoral Commission, reached an understanding on remedial measures to address concerns by some stakeholders, notably the opposition National Democratic Congress, over the voters list. Following a stand-off in Parliament over which party constitutes the majority, the Speaker suspended sittings indefinitely for lack of a quorum, despite the Supreme Court's ruling to stay his decision declaring four seats vacant.

12. In Guinea, a new draft constitution was unveiled on 29 July. The Prime Minister, Amadou Oury Bah, stated that the draft would be put to a vote in a referendum by the end of 2024, while local, legislative and presidential elections would be conducted in 2025. Senior government officials argued that the transitional President, Mamadi Doumbouya, should run for election. From 23 to 27 September, the ECOWAS Commission deployed a technical mission to "further deepen collaboration with Guinea on the transition", as requested at the sixty-fifth ordinary summit of the ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State and Government. Meanwhile, the fate and whereabouts of the leaders of the *Front national pour la défense de la constitution*, Oumar Sylla and Mamadou Billo Bah, reportedly arrested on 9 July, remained unknown.

13. In Guinea-Bissau, political tensions persisted, notably over the legality and legitimacy of the National Electoral Commission and the Supreme Court of Justice. On 4 November, citing delays in technical preparations, the President, Umaro Sissoco Embaló, revoked an earlier decree setting the date of legislative elections for 24 November. While a new date was not announced, the Supreme Court of Justice rejected the candidacies of two main political coalitions on 7 November due to unaddressed "irregularities". Meanwhile, on 20 September, the President-elect of the dissolved Parliament, Domingos Simões Pereira, convened a meeting of the parliamentary standing committee, which included deliberations on the Supreme Court. Mr. Embaló warned that the committee did not have the mandate to hold the meeting. On 23 September, after being escorted by security forces, the Second Vice-President elect, Adja Satu Camará, assumed the position of President of Parliament on an interim basis and has since convened a meeting of the standing committee on 8 November.

14. In Liberia, the period was marked by ongoing audits of public expenditure and efforts to combat corruption, which exacerbated political tensions, leading to a stalemate in the House of Representatives. On 17 October, lawmakers attempted to oust the Speaker of the House of Representatives, alleging a conflict of interest. The Liberia Anti-Corruption Commission opened an investigation into allegations of bribery surrounding the stand-off.

15. In Mali, the decree of 10 April suspending the activities of political parties and civil society organizations was lifted on 10 July. On 15 and 16 July, political parties and civil society organizations boycotted a meeting of the *Autorité indépendante de gestion des élections*, which was aimed at restarting consultations on the electoral timetable, reiterating their demands for a fully inclusive and transparent electoral process. On 23 August, the national authorities declared a state of national disaster following flooding caused by heavy rains. On 19 September, the Public Prosecutor

appealed against an order for the release of several opposition leaders arrested on 11 June. More than four months after their arrest, the 11 political leaders from the parties and groupings that signed the declaration of 31 March are yet to be released. To foster peace and reconciliation, the authorities held consultations with traditional and religious leaders on 22 July. Subsequently, building on the results of the inter-Malian dialogue concluded in May, a commission has been drafting a national peace and reconciliation charter, which is yet to be submitted to the transitional President, Assimi Goïta. Reportedly, on 20 November, following public criticism of the military authorities by the Prime Minister, Choguel Kokalla Maïga, Mr. Goïta announced in a decree read on State television that the duties of the Prime Minister and members of the Government had been “terminated”. On 21 November, Abdoulaye Maïga was appointed as the new Prime Minister.

16. In Mauritania, on 4 July, the Constitutional Council proclaimed the results of the presidential election of 29 June, confirming the incumbent President, Mohamed Ould Cheikh El Ghazouani, with 56.1 per cent, followed by the parliamentarian Biram Dah Abeid with 22.1 per cent of the vote. While Mr. Abeid did not file a formal appeal, demonstrations following his rejection of the results led to three deaths in the southern town of Kaédi. On 5 August, Mr. Ghazouani appointed a new Government led by the Prime Minister, Mokhtar Ould Diay, with a declared focus on strengthening the rule of law, sustainable development, human capital development, security and social cohesion. The new Government has also expressed its intent to hold an inclusive dialogue. On 12 August, the Nouakchott court of appeal rejected a request for the temporary release of the former President, Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz, who was sentenced for money-laundering and illicit enrichment in December 2023.

17. In the Niger, as part of the country’s outreach to North African countries, the Prime Minister, Ali Mahamane Lamine Zeine, concluded a three-day visit to Algiers on 13 August, during which he met with the President of Algeria, Abdelmadjid Tebboune. On 28 August, hearings commenced in relation to charges for high treason and undermining national security against the former President, Mohamed Bazoum, who remained in detention. Despite a court order on 29 July calling for their release on bail, four former ministers in Mr. Bazoum’s Government also remained in detention. The country’s relations with Benin have improved, as exemplified by the resumption of Nigerien oil exports through the new port of Sèmè in Benin. This followed a visit by the former Presidents of Benin, Boni Yayi and Nicéphore Soglo, to Niamey in late June, and a Nigerien delegation meeting with the President of Benin, Patrice Talon, in Cotonou on 25 July.

18. In Nigeria, ongoing economic and financial reforms triggered nationwide protests in August and October. Violence, loss of life and destruction of property marred demonstrations held across the country from 1 to 10 August, with many protesters arrested and detained, some of whom were on trial at the time of writing. Addressing the nation on 4 August, the President, Bola Ahmed Tinubu, acknowledged citizens’ frustrations while emphasizing the need for dialogue and respect for law and order. He reaffirmed his commitment to pursuing macroeconomic and financial reforms to enhance governance, prosperity and stability, while recalling palliative measures adopted by the Government. Edo State held its off-cycle gubernatorial election in which it elected a Governor from the ruling All Progressives Congress on 21 September. The opposition People’s Democratic Party disputed the results. On 23 October, Mr. Tinubu conducted a major Cabinet reshuffle aimed at making his Administration more efficient. His new 48-member Cabinet includes only seven women, a decrease from the previous Cabinet, which had eight.

19. In Senegal, the President, Bassirou Diomaye Faye, initiated governance reforms and conducted audits of public finances and of the oil, gas and mining sectors. In this regard, a national forum on the rule of law convened by the President submitted a

report on 4 July containing recommendations to strengthen the judiciary. In compliance with constitutional requirements, and with a view to gaining the parliamentary majority needed to adopt reform initiatives, Mr. Faye dissolved the National Assembly on 12 September. On 17 September, a new entity to combat financial and related crimes was established, amid allegations that persons linked to the previous Administration were being targeted for prosecution. On 26 September, the Prime Minister, Ousmane Sonko, declared that fiscal and economic figures provided by the Administration of the previous President, Macky Sall, were inaccurate. On 17 November, Senegal held peaceful parliamentary elections with 41 electoral lists contesting 165 seats in the unicameral National Assembly. According to provisional results published on 21 November, Mr. Sonko's party, *Patriotes africains du Sénégal pour le travail, l'éthique et la fraternité*, secured 130 seats while Mr. Sall's coalition, *Takku Wallu Sénégal*, came second with 16 seats.

20. In Sierra Leone, in follow-up to the Agreement for National Unity of October 2023 between the main opposition All People's Congress and the Government, the cross-party committee on electoral systems and management bodies review submitted its report on 1 July containing 80 recommendations, including on legal and institutional reforms of the electoral framework. An assessment mission by the Agreement's international moral guarantors (ECOWAS, the African Union, the Commonwealth and UNOWAS) from 14 to 18 October noted progress in the implementation of the recommendations and urged the parties to the Agreement to further accelerate efforts. On 27 September, Sierra Leone signed a \$480 million compact with the Millennium Challenge Corporation of the United States of America to strengthen the Sierra Leone energy sector, while conditioning implementation on progress on governance reform.

21. In Togo, following the promulgation in May of the constitutional amendment bill, thereby shifting to a parliamentary system, the President, Faure Gnassingbé, reappointed Victoire Tomegah Dogbé as Prime Minister on 1 August to lead a transitional Government tasked with ushering in the institutions established under the new Fundamental Law. On 23 August, as part of its strategy to decentralize public administration, the Government appointed governors to head the five regions.

B. Security situation

22. The security situation in the region continued to be marked by terrorist activity, with the Al-Qaida-affiliated Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin and Islamic State in the Greater Sahara, both active in the Liptako-Gourma region in the Central Sahel, posing the main threats to security in the Sahel and the wider West Africa region. In Burkina Faso, the Armed Conflict Location and Events Data project recorded 1,535 fatalities – including civilians, the military, armed groups and others – between July and October, similar to the same period in 2023. After a decline in fatalities from May to July, violence erupted in August due to major attacks by Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin, including an assault on a defence convoy near Nassougou (Gourma Province, Est Region) on 9 August, killing 148 personnel; an attack in Barsalogo (Sanmatenga Province, Central Region) on 24 August, which reportedly killed 200 people and injured 140; and coordinated strikes on 30 August that hit multiple sites, including a civilian defence volunteer base in Barga with 13 fatalities and a site in Yondé with 10 fatalities, and caused significant damage to a security base in Bam.

23. Both Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin and the *Cadre stratégique permanent pour la défense du peuple de l'Azawad* (CSP-DPA), a signatory party to the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali, continued to be active in Mali, with fewer, albeit deadlier, incidents. With a peak in July, 1,190 fatalities were recorded between July and October, compared with 1,566 over the same period in 2023.

On 21 July, for example, Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin reportedly attacked Dembo, near Bankass in central Mali, killing about 20 people. From 25 to 27 July, Mali defence forces and foreign support elements clashed with CSP-DPA at Tin Zaouatène, in the Kidal Region near the Algerian border, causing an unconfirmed number of deaths and injuries. In the first major attack on Bamako since 2015, Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin launched attacks on 17 September on a gendarmerie academy and on Bamako airport, reportedly resulting in numerous casualties and extensive damage to aircraft, including two United Nations Humanitarian Air Service planes. Former MINUSMA camps in Gao, Timbuktu and Kidal were also attacked by Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin between 6 and 8 October. In response, the Malian army increased its operations in northern Mali.

24. In the Niger, Armed Conflict Location and Events Data recorded 467 fatalities from July to October, compared with 404 over the same period in 2023. Similar to Mali, fatalities in 2024 peaked in July. Three attacks from 15 to 17 September in several locations, including Tillabéri, killed at least 12 soldiers and wounded 30 others, according to the Nigerien army. The attackers reportedly included militants from the Patriotic Movement for Freedom and Justice, an offshoot of the Patriotic Liberation Front armed group that claims to be fighting for the release of the ousted President, Mr. Bazoum.

25. Benin and Togo continued to experience violent attacks along regions bordering the Central Sahel. In northern Benin, on 24 July, Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin claimed an attack at W National Park, which reportedly killed seven security personnel and five park rangers. On 15 September, two police officers were killed in an ambush near the Karimama police station in the Alibori Department of Benin. In Togo, on 20 July, Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin claimed an attack on a military outpost in Kpinkankandi, reportedly causing the death of 12 soldiers. On 6 August, an attack claimed by Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin near Kankanti involving a remote-control improvised explosive device killed several soldiers.

26. In the Lake Chad basin countries, the use of improvised explosive devices and suicide attacks continued to pose significant challenges for security forces and civilians, compounded by intercommunal clashes, kidnappings and other militant and criminal activities. Suicide attacks in Gwoza Local Government Area on 29 June and in Konduga Local Government Area on 31 July (both in Borno State) caused 32 and 16 fatalities, respectively. Although unclaimed, these attacks, replicating the modus operandi of Boko Haram/Islamic State West Africa Province, raised fears of a wider relapse into violence. On 1 September, suspected Boko Haram members struck the Mafa community in Yobe State, resulting in an unknown number of casualties. Collaborative security efforts registered some success. The Multinational Joint Task Force reported that, from January to September, it had "neutralized" at least 140 presumed violent extremists, while 57 were arrested and 176 surrendered.

27. Member States enhanced bilateral agreements in efforts to tackle security challenges. On 28 August, the defence chiefs of the Niger and Nigeria signed a memorandum of understanding in Niamey to boost cooperation against terrorism in the Lake Chad basin, with the Niger resuming its participation in the Multinational Joint Task Force. On 10 September, the Minister of National Security of Ghana met with the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Burkina Faso in Ouagadougou to enhance security cooperation and support for Burkinabe refugees. On 6 September, the Chief of General Staff of Libya visited the Niger to strengthen military cooperation and bolster border security. On 23 September, Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger signed an agreement with the Russian aerospace agency to acquire communication satellites to enhance their border surveillance and security, as well as communications.

28. Drug seizures by law enforcement agencies in West Africa continued. On 11 July, Senegalese customs officers confiscated over 360 kg of cocaine in Koumpentoum, Tambacounda Region, in the third major cocaine seizure since January. On 7 September, an aircraft was seized by the judicial police at Bissau airport. Its cargo of 2.6 tons of cocaine, considered the largest seizure thus far, was subsequently incinerated under secure conditions, with support from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.

29. In the Gulf of Guinea, the level of maritime piracy and armed robbery remained low, with the International Maritime Organization reporting only one incident of attempted robbery during the reporting period.

C. Socioeconomic context

30. In a report issued in July, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) reduced the overall growth projections for sub-Saharan Africa, “mainly as a result of [a] downward revision to the growth outlook in Nigeria”. Notably, governance challenges, high inflation and the persistent threat of terrorist activity had hampered the effectiveness of economic reforms in the largest West African economy. Largely due to political uncertainty, IMF also lowered its outlook for Senegal for a second time, despite the start of commercial oil exploration in late June. In a report issued on 1 October, the World Bank noted that uncertainty over the unconstitutional change of government in Niger had sharply reduced economic growth to 2 per cent, from initial projections of up to 12 per cent for 2024. Inflation also remained above 20 per cent in Ghana and Sierra Leone, contributing to political disenchantment in Ghana ahead of the elections in December 2024. On 12 June, Ghana secured a debt cancellation agreement amounting to 37 per cent of its \$13 billion debt, following sustained negotiations; and on 20 September, Sierra Leone reached an agreement with IMF for a new \$253 million support package.

D. Humanitarian context

31. Multidimensional and interconnected crises in West Africa and the Sahel continued to contribute to a deterioration of the humanitarian situation. According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 48.6 million people throughout the region were projected to experience food insecurity in the critical lean period from June and August. This was an increase from 42.9 million during the same period in 2023, mainly due to worsening conditions in Burkina Faso, Mali, the Niger and Nigeria. For the whole of 2024, 25.8 million people in those four countries will need humanitarian assistance and protection, according to the Office.

32. According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, internal and cross-border displacement increased by about 5 per cent. As at 30 September, there were more than 6.5 million internally displaced persons in Burkina Faso, Mali, the Niger and Nigeria (compared with 6.2 million in the previous reporting period). In addition, there were approximately 690,000 refugees and asylum-seekers in those countries (compared with 630,000 previously), along with approximately 150,000 in Mauritania (up by 43,000) and about 143,000 in Benin, Côte d’Ivoire, Ghana and Togo (up by 23,000).

33. Heavy rains leading to severe flooding caused the destruction of infrastructure, such as dams and large swathes of farmland, resulting in significant economic losses and food insecurity in the region. The floods also destroyed houses and education and health facilities. As at 20 November, extreme flooding had affected more than 3.7 million people in West Africa in 2024, of whom 1.5 million were in the Niger and

about 1.3 million in Nigeria, followed by Mali (370,000), Guinea (175,000), Senegal (103,000) and Liberia (51,000), among other countries, causing at least 833 deaths. According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, more than 878,000 people had been displaced, affecting mostly Nigeria (729,000), Senegal (56,000), Liberia (51,000), Mali (18,000) and Mauritania (12,500). An outbreak of cholera in Nigeria, Ghana and Togo further aggravated the situation. The World Food Programme warned that the floods were worsening food insecurity in those countries.

34. Due to insecurity across Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger, more than 8,200 schools remained closed (more than half of which were in Burkina Faso). Ensuring access to basic services, especially for the most vulnerable, remained a priority even as health centres remained non-operational in many insecure areas. Of the \$3.2 billion needed for humanitarian response plans in Burkina Faso, Mali, the Niger and Nigeria, aimed at reaching 15 million people, 45 per cent had been received as at 18 November. Without additional funding, millions of vulnerable people will be left without vital support.

E. Human rights

35. Wide-ranging restrictions remained in place in the four countries under military rule. In Burkina Faso, Guinea and the Niger, political activities remained suspended, while the ban in Mali was lifted on 10 July. Human rights organizations recorded kidnappings and enforced disappearances, notably in Burkina Faso and Guinea. In addition, civil society actors, journalists and judicial and political actors were forcefully conscripted into the armed forces. On 2 September, Guinean authorities announced the suspension of the issuance or renewal of permits for civil society organizations while the 2022 ban on public demonstrations remained in force. In Mali, the human rights situation remained marked by the arrest, detention and/or prosecution of political and civil society actors. For instance, on 8 July, a senior Malian government official, Boubacar Karamoko Traoré, was sentenced to one year in prison by a Bamako court on charges of “undermining the credibility of the State”, “disseminating misleading statements likely to disturb public peace” and “contempt of court” for publishing a memorandum in which his political movement openly criticized the Malian transitional authorities. He was released on 2 September after his sentence was reduced to three months by the Bamako court of appeal. On 3 October, the civil society actor Youssof Daba Diawara was prosecuted for “opposition to legitimate authority” following his arrest on 12 July for participating in a peaceful protest in Bamako in June. He was released on 5 October.

36. Restrictions on political and civic space in some countries of the region remained a concern as citizens, political opponents and journalists were increasingly detained under laws intended to combat terrorism, cybercrime or “fake news”. In the Niger, new legal instruments adopted on 7 June on offences related to cybercrime and on 27 August on the creation of a database of terrorism suspects raised questions over the presumption of innocence and the likelihood of harsh penalties. In Côte d’Ivoire, on 14 August, civil society groups referred the matter to the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, denouncing a decree of 14 June, which they allege impairs fundamental freedoms.

37. Steve Amoussou, a Benin national alleged to be the online political activist “Frère Hounvi”, was apprehended on 12 August in Lomé and subsequently transferred to Benin, where he is being prosecuted for “electronic harassment, initiation and publication of fake news”. On 6 September, the Guinea-Bissau Human Rights League held a vigil to protest what they considered to be the illegal dismissal, retirement and suspension of judges, including Supreme Court justices, as well as the removal of members of Parliament from the Superior Council of Justice. The decision of the

military court on 19 July to release all individuals involved in the attempted coup on 1 February 2022 has yet to be executed.

38. In Senegal, civil society groups accused the Government of intimidating political opponents through detentions relating to accusations of spreading false news and discrediting authorities. In the Gambia, the arrest and detention of individuals perceived to have criticized the President and/or the Government continued, the most recent example being of two journalists, Musa Sheriff and Momodou Justice Darboe, arrested on 26 September for reporting that the President, Adama Barrow, was planning his exit ahead of the 2026 elections. They were put on trial following a defamation suit filed by Mr. Barrow. In October, international human rights organizations expressed concern about the continuous “tactics of intimidation” aimed at stifling freedom of expression and called on the Government to drop all charges against the journalists. On 4 November, the President dropped the charges following a meeting with the Gambia Press Union and allied media organizations.

39. During the reporting period, there was meaningful progress in transitional justice, especially in the Gambia, Guinea and Liberia. According to its National Human Rights Commission, the Gambia made advances in implementing the recommendations of the Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission. Although the ECOWAS Mediation and Security Council decided to postpone a decision on the statute of an ECOWAS-Gambia hybrid court on 3 July, preparations continued within the country to establish a tribunal for crimes committed under the former President, Yahya Jammeh. In Guinea, the judgment issued on 31 July concerning the events at the stadium in Conakry on 28 September 2009 found former senior officials guilty of crimes against humanity, among other charges, contributing to the promotion of accountability for past crimes. In Liberia, the President, Joseph Boakai, appointed the new Executive Director of the country’s Office of the War and Economic Crimes Court on 1 November.

40. On other human rights matters, parliamentarians in the Gambia voted on 15 July to uphold a 2015 ban on female genital mutilation in a context of concerns about regression in women’s rights. In Senegal, on 24 September, the National Assembly unanimously adopted a bill to create a strengthened National Human Rights Commission, replacing the current Human Rights Committee, which is seen as insufficiently independent. In Mauritania, on 10 September, the National Assembly established a specialized court to fight against slavery and human trafficking.

F. Gender and youth

41. There was some progress on the participation of women in decision-making processes. The adoption on 30 July by the Parliament of Ghana of the Affirmative Action Gender Equity Bill represents a major milestone for the participation of women in public life, as it calls for minimum representation of 40 per cent, increasing gradually to parity (50 per cent) by 2030. On 19 September, the President, Nana Akufo-Addo, signed the bill into law. On 30 July, Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger agreed to establish a consultation framework to coordinate efforts on the promotion of women’s rights and gender equality.

42. Some Governments made efforts towards the operationalization and institutionalization of the youth and peace and security agenda, including Nigeria, where an internal assessment was conducted. Benin, Nigeria and Togo also activated or supported youth-led initiatives aimed at building cohesion and strengthening community dialogue efforts to combat violent extremism in their respective northern regions.

III. Activities of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel

A. Good offices and special assignments of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for West Africa and the Sahel

43. During the reporting period, the Special Representative sought to foster consensus and rebuild trust among regional leaders amid the ongoing impasse between ECOWAS and the countries of the Alliance of Sahel States, while publicly encouraging efforts to bridge divides in the interest of collective and shared responsibilities. Throughout his engagements, he stressed the need for pragmatic and innovative approaches to regional collaboration to address the interlinked political and security challenges facing the Central Sahel region, in particular resulting from terrorism and transnational crime, while advocating for sustained and coordinated support from international partners to meet the evolving security and humanitarian needs.

44. To build support for regional approaches, at the ministerial session of the ECOWAS Mediation and Security Council and during the ordinary summit of the Authority of Heads of State and Government, held in Abuja on 3 and 7 July, respectively, the Special Representative welcomed support for his efforts and stressed the importance of finding common ground to bridge divides within ECOWAS. In efforts to preserve the gains of regional integration, the Special Representative supported the Senegalese Presidential Envoy, Abdoulaye Bathily, in his mission. He also encouraged countries of the Alliance of Sahel States to participate in discussions on ECOWAS reform and contribute to the adaptation of the organization to address the multifaceted regional challenges.

45. The Special Representative met Mr. Akufo-Addo on 5 July, with the aim of reinvigorating the Accra Initiative as a key mechanism for security collaboration and to curb the spread of insecurity to coastal States. On 17 and 18 September, he met with the Presidents of Togo and Benin, who welcomed his efforts to gradually rebuild trust between the Alliance of Sahel States and ECOWAS, and between the Alliance and the coastal States, through practical collaboration on shared concerns. He then held consultations on 29 October in Accra with the acting Secretary-General of the Accra Initiative, with a view to identifying ways to revitalize the regional framework as a viable vehicle for regional security cooperation.

46. In preparation for the elections in Ghana on 7 December, the Special Representative interacted regularly with national stakeholders to promote an inclusive and transparent process, both during his visit from 4 to 6 July and subsequently through participation in stakeholder forums across the country convened by the National Peace Council, with the objective of expanding support for the Council-led “I Pledge for Peace” campaign.

47. Building on his earlier missions in advance of the elections in Mauritania on 29 June, the Special Representative attended the swearing-in of Mr. Ghazouani as President on 1 August, with whom he discussed joint efforts to promote peace and security. Engaging actively in the post-electoral context, the Special Representative advocated for dialogue to address the challenges facing the country and strengthen social cohesion.

48. Amid latent tensions in Liberia following the Government’s decision to combat corruption and create the Office of the War and Economic Crimes Court, the Special Representative returned to Monrovia on 12 and 13 September to meet with the President, political leaders and international partners. He praised the country’s

democratic progress and stressed the need for support for the country to successfully address the crimes of the past, as an important component of the national reconciliation process. Collaborating closely with ECOWAS to defuse tensions in the country, he advocated for support for the long-term development needs of Liberia and a coordinated response to the recent influx of Burkinabe nationals.

49. As part of a joint mission of the international moral guarantors on the implementation of the Agreement for National Unity, the Special Representative returned to Freetown from 14 to 18 October to urge the parties to join efforts to implement the Agreement and reiterate calls to reinforce trust and promote inclusive dialogue for sustainable peace, unity and stability.

B. Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission

50. At its sixth extraordinary session, on 27 June, chaired by the Special Representative, the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission commended the decision by Nigeria to desist from referring back to the International Court of Justice the interpretation of the text in relation to the resolution of the three outstanding areas of disagreement. The Commission tasked the Sub-Commission on Demarcation with finding solutions for the three areas and endorsed a road map to complete the border demarcation activities by the end of 2025. A comprehensive assessment of residual peacebuilding needs was also validated by national and United Nations counterparts to guide interventions for the communities affected by the border demarcation in the two countries. UNOWAS and the International Organization for Migration agreed to fundraise jointly to finance development projects along the common border.

C. Enhancing regional and subregional partnerships to address cross-border and cross-cutting threats to peace and security

51. UNOWAS continued to collaborate with regional partners, notably ECOWAS and the Mano River Union. As part of their joint workplan, ECOWAS and UNOWAS conducted several joint technical assessment missions, including to Ghana from 21 to 27 July to identify challenges to the upcoming elections and recommend solutions, and to Senegal from 13 to 19 October. On 21 and 22 July, UNOWAS participated in a meeting of the Ministers for Foreign Affairs, Finance and Defence of the Mano River Union in Monrovia to discuss ways to promote a “more coordinated response to security and development challenges”. Following the signing of a framework of cooperation between UNOWAS and the Union in March, the Special Representative discussed ways to amplify the Union’s leverage on peace and stability in the region with the President of Liberia on 12 September. On 30 September, the Deputy Special Representative participated virtually in a senior-level meeting with the Union, the African Development Bank and resident coordinators from the region to discuss joint efforts for addressing fragility and strengthening resilience in the subregion. In addition, on 26 July, UNOWAS held a technical meeting with the executive secretariat of the Accra Initiative, preceding the Special Representative’s consultations with the Presidents of Benin and Togo in September.

52. To assess implementation of relevant Security Council resolutions on countering terrorism, the Counter Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate conducted follow-up assessment visits to Mauritania from 17 to 21 October, to Ghana from 4 to 8 November with the participation of Deputy Special Representative, and to Côte d’Ivoire from 11 to 13 November.

53. UNOWAS continued to enhance its collaboration with the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa in addressing cross-regional threats to peace and

security. On 11 October, they reviewed cross-regional activities under their 2024 joint annual workplan and harmonized joint visits and engagements.

54. Through high-level advocacy and technical assistance, UNOWAS maintained its support to the security sector and related reform processes. As part of the overall evaluation of United Nations assistance for security sector reform over the past 10 years, country reviews were completed for Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, the Gambia and Guinea. In this regard, from 2 to 5 July, UNOWAS and the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo held an experience-sharing workshop in Dakar on security sector reform processes between security sector reform actors in West Africa and counterparts from the Democratic Republic of Congo. UNOWAS also contributed to the production of a security sector reform training course by the United States Institute of Peace and, on 30 July, signed a cooperation agreement with the Alioune Blondin Beye Peacekeeping School in Bamako. On 17 September, the Deputy Special Representative held a discussion with partners, following up on the launch in 2023 of the Integrated Border Stability Mechanism for West Africa, a multilateral coordinating structure for separate but complementary internationally funded capacity-building projects jointly led by the International Organization for Migration, the Office of Counter-Terrorism, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and the International Criminal Police Organization.

1. Approach and engagement with the Alliance of Sahel States

55. Between 17 and 27 July, the Special Representative accompanied the Deputy Secretary-General on her visits to Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mali, the Niger, Nigeria and Senegal. During her visits she held discussions with national authorities concerning the political, humanitarian and socioeconomic situation in the countries, as well as regional and international cooperation, and encouraged progress on the Sustainable Development Goals. The discussions also focused on how the United Nations can better address persistent development challenges, strengthen partnerships and ensure continued support for the most vulnerable groups through integrated approaches. The discussions highlighted opportunities to foster dialogue and collaboration between the United Nations and the respective Governments.

2. Engagement on the Lake Chad basin

56. On 20 September, in N'Djamena, the steering committee for the Regional Strategy for the Stabilization, Recovery and Resilience of the Boko Haram-affected Areas of the Lake Chad Basin Region validated the draft adjusted strategy, pending endorsement by the Lake Chad Basin Commission Council of Ministers. Priority actions for 2025 were also agreed.

3. Piracy and armed robbery at sea in the Gulf of Guinea

57. UNOWAS and the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa made progress on the evaluation of the operationalization of the Yaoundé maritime security architecture, with completion envisaged by early December.

4. Adverse implications of climate change

58. UNOWAS assisted the Liptako-Gourma Authority in developing and validating national strategies for climate, peace and security in Mali, where national consultations were held from 10 to 12 September, in Burkina Faso, where a national validation workshop was held on 30 September, and in the Niger, where the process was ongoing at the time of writing.

59. UNOWAS also supported ECOWAS in identifying priorities ahead of its participation in the twenty-ninth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, held in Baku in November, sharing information on the climate, peace and security nexus for consideration by Member States ahead of their participation in the session. As part of a UNOWAS-United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute joint initiative, a regional workshop from 29 to 31 July in Dakar designed a climate-related risk assessment methodology that integrates local knowledge and proposes solutions to manage risks sustainably. Under the United Nations Regional Working Group on Climate Change, Security, Environment and Development in West Africa and the Sahel, UNOWAS co-organized a regional dialogue on climate and mobility in Lomé from 17 to 19 September, in which 70 participants from 16 countries in West and Central Africa highlighted the importance of inclusive participation, especially of women and young people, in climate-related decision-making. In partnership with the Peacebuilding Fund and other United Nations entities, UNOWAS also provided guidance to the Gambian authorities on suggested approaches and key elements to consider in the conduct of the climate security risk assessment of the Gambia River basin.

D. Implementation of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel

60. UNOWAS continued to engage with the Office of the Special Coordinator for Development in the Sahel and other United Nations entities to advance the implementation of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel. Between 9 June and 5 July, UNOWAS participated in a mission of United Nations regional directors to Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger, co-led by the Special Coordinator and the Development Coordination Office Regional Director for Africa. The mission, aimed at reaffirming the readiness of the United Nations to support the three countries in navigating the current complex situation and to strengthen the United Nations country teams' configuration and capacity to deliver on development, humanitarian response and peacebuilding, enabled discussions for aligning United Nations support to the evolving context and national priorities. Building on the mission and the Deputy Secretary-General's visit, UNOWAS, through its good offices, along with the Office of the Special Coordinator, has been supporting resident coordinators and United Nations country teams in the region to strengthen the implementation of programmes under the integrated strategy and scale up United Nations development efforts and humanitarian support in key focus areas. On 10 and 11 July, in collaboration with the Islamic Development Bank, the Office of the Special Coordinator launched a joint mapping study for climate-sensitive development programmes that addresses governance and related challenges in the countries under the strategy.

61. In Conakry on 29 August, as part of the strategy's goal of promoting water as an accelerator for development, various United Nations entities validated an action plan to implement the Fouta Djallon Declaration, which was the outcome of a mission conducted by the Special Coordinator and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations to the Fouta Djallon area of Guinea to take stock of environmental challenges that risk affecting some of the region's main water sources, including the Senegal River. On 30 September, the Special Coordinator launched the "Voices from the Sahel: Conversations, Visions and Solutions" initiative aimed at amplifying the voices of young people for changing the narrative on the Sahel by sharing positive stories and celebrating its diverse cultures and creative practices. The initiative is intended to shape the design of programmes across the region under the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel. The Office of the Special Coordinator continued efforts to convene the United Nations system in the Sahel and strengthen

the coherence of United Nations development priorities through integrated programmes and by promoting good governance, respect for the rule of law, human rights and gender mainstreaming.

62. UNOWAS continued to collaborate with its partners in promoting good governance, human rights, the rule of law and gender mainstreaming. Recognizing the central role of national human rights institutions, UNOWAS, in partnership with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and ECOWAS, supported the sixth regional consultation of national human rights institutions in West Africa, held in Cotonou from 27 to 29 August.

63. UNOWAS continued to strengthen the West African Bar Association following its reactivation with United Nations support in 2023. UNOWAS, in collaboration with the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, the United Nations Development Programme, OHCHR and the Office of the Rule of Law and Security Institutions of the Department of Peace Operations, supported the Association's second annual conference in Cotonou from 25 to 27 June, at which it adopted a constitution and elected its executive committee.

64. UNOWAS provided technical support to OHCHR for the holding of a regional stakeholders consultation of the United Nations Network on Migration on 28 August, in preparation for a review of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration in Abuja on 3 and 4 September.

65. Pursuing its efforts on gender mainstreaming in the context of regional peacebuilding, UNOWAS held a capacity-building workshop in Senegal from 10 to 12 September for 25 women leaders and representatives of women's networks from across the region. Participants adopted a road map and requested the set-up of a standby team of regional women mediator leaders. On International Day of Rural Women and the regional open day celebrated in Freetown on 15 October, the Special Representative consulted with women and youth leaders from West Africa and the Sahel to share best practices and lessons learned in view of the twenty-fifth anniversary of Security Council resolution [1325 \(2000\)](#) on women and peace and security.

66. UNOWAS continued to host the secretariat and coordinate the Working Group on Women, Youth, Peace and Security in West Africa and the Sahel. In a virtual meeting held on 4 July, UNOWAS facilitated a thematic exchange with over 110 youth participants from 17 countries on the use of technology for the prevention of violent extremism. In Freetown, from 16 to 18 October, UNOWAS hosted the Working Group's fifteenth annual meeting to discuss challenges and validate national and regional workplans for 2025.

67. UNOWAS, in collaboration with other partners, supported the mainstreaming and advancement of the youth and peace and security agenda towards developing national action plans on Security Council resolution [2250 \(2015\)](#). In this respect, UNOWAS, the United Nations Population Fund, the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and others continued to implement the United Nations peace and development trust fund project on enhancing national youth and peace and security capacities in West Africa. Regional consultations were held in Benin on 14, 15, 17 and 18 October and in Liberia on 17 and 18 October. With the support of UNOWAS and other United Nations entities, Guinea, Senegal and Togo also started the development of their action plans.

IV. Observations and recommendations

68. The West Africa and Sahel region has historically been a positive example of regional integration, bringing tangible benefits to Member States. As these ties have weakened in an increasingly complex environment, it is crucial for regional leaders to renew efforts to overcome differences and promote regional cooperation to tackle persisting challenges. This is essential for the development of an effective regional security mechanism to combat the persistent threats of insecurity, violent extremism and transnational organized crime that endanger the lives and livelihoods of people across the region. Failure to cooperate carries the risk of further vulnerabilities as insecurity spreads.

69. In support of collaborative security efforts, I urge the acceleration and full operationalization of the Accra Initiative and the ECOWAS Standby Force in line with its 2020–2024 action plan to combat terrorism in West Africa. It is equally important to uphold Security Council resolution 2601 (2021) on protecting education in conflict and to address the root causes of terrorism and violent extremism through a holistic approach, including the implementation of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel. I also call for greater support for the Regional Strategy for the Stabilization, Recovery and Resilience of the Boko Haram-affected Areas of the Lake Chad Basin Region.

70. In the countries undergoing transitions, I call for genuine efforts towards political reform and inclusive and meaningful dialogue, with a view to the swift return to constitutional order and the long-term consolidation of democracy, the rule of law and stability. I urge international partners to maintain their engagement in supporting these countries and their populations as they tackle security threats and lay the groundwork for sustainable development and economic transformation.

71. As the Pact for the Future underscores the importance of investing in confidence-building mechanisms and fostering dialogue, I encourage ECOWAS to use its anticipated extraordinary summit on the future of regional integration to reaffirm priorities and readjust mechanisms to deliver meaningful benefits to the whole of West Africa and the Sahel in dynamic political and socioeconomic environments. Current migration trends highlight the urgent need for policies and programmes to meet the hopes of the region's young people for a better future.

72. I commend the peaceful conduct of legislative and presidential elections in Mauritania and Senegal. I look forward to similar peaceful outcomes in the upcoming general elections in Ghana. I encourage national stakeholders and electoral management bodies in Côte d'Ivoire to intensify efforts to build consensus and ensure that the elections in 2025 are inclusive and participatory, with electoral processes and party platforms that address the aspirations of the population. I also celebrate the progress achieved in Sierra Leone following the signing of the Agreement for National Unity and urge the maintenance of a spirit of collaboration for the Agreement's full implementation. I remain concerned about the lack of consensus around the upcoming electoral processes in Guinea-Bissau and call on stakeholders to engage in constructive dialogue to create space for crucial reforms promoting long-term stability and development.

73. The verdict in the case of the incident in the stadium in Conakry on 28 September 2009 is a significant step forward in the fight against impunity, reinforcing the message that accountability is achievable. In this regard, I also call on Liberians to unite around the establishment of the War and Economic Crimes Court as an essential element of accountability and ensure that its proceedings are fairly and transparently conducted. I appeal to international partners to continue to support the transitional justice process in the Gambia, which is making steady progress.

74. I remain deeply concerned about severe restrictions on political space and reports of human rights violations, including abductions and enforced disappearances. Upholding human rights, including essential freedoms of expression and assembly, is foundational to effective governance and the social contract between Governments and citizens.

75. The severe flooding in 2024 exacerbated vulnerabilities across the region, with climate change continuing to pose significant challenges. I call on the countries of the region and ECOWAS to develop conflict-sensitive climate change adaptation plans and invite partners to support their implementation as part of a comprehensive peacebuilding strategy that takes into full account the climate change-related security risks.

76. While progress on women's representation in decision-making entities remains a challenge, I welcome the adoption of the Affirmative Action Gender Equity Bill by Ghana and urge its timely implementation. I also reiterate my call for the effective implementation of national action plans on women's empowerment across the region.

77. I welcome the continued progress made by the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission and encourage all parties concerned to accelerate the resolution of the few outstanding areas of disagreement, enabling fulfilment of the International Court of Justice judgment of 2002 and the completion of the Commission's mandate.

78. Building on the positive outcomes achieved through collaboration under the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel, with the support of UNOWAS, the Office of the Special Coordinator and the United Nations development system at the regional and country levels, I urge continued cooperation in implementing the strategy through strengthened partnerships and increased resource allocation for the region.

79. Despite the funding constraints affecting UNOWAS, the United Nations remains steadfast in its commitment to advancing peace and democratic governance in West Africa and the Sahel. I wish to express my appreciation to ECOWAS, the African Union and all regional partners for their continued cooperation with UNOWAS. I also extend my gratitude to the Special Representative and to the staff of UNOWAS and the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission for their continuing efforts to advance peace and security in the region.
