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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 January to 22 June 2020 and provides an overview of developments and trends in West Africa and the Sahel. It also captures the activities of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) and highlights progress made in the implementation of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel. In addition, it provides 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. Since my previous report ([S/2019/1005](#)), the political situation in West Africa and the Sahel has been marked by uneven progress. Electoral and constitutional processes proceeded with varying degrees of inclusivity, transparency and credibility, raising tensions in some countries. Terrorist activities and intercommunal violence contributed to a degrading regional security environment amid a worsening humanitarian crisis and the outbreak of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. Systematic attacks by armed groups on civilian and military targets in Burkina Faso, Mali, the Niger and Nigeria posed serious threats to peace and stability for the region and beyond.

3. Voting was held in Benin (local), Guinea (legislative, as well as a constitutional referendum), Mali (legislative) and Togo (presidential). Preparations for presidential elections continued in Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea and the Niger. The countries of the region and regional institutions continued to address competing political, security and development challenges while grappling with response measures to the COVID-19 crisis.

A. Political and governance trends

4. In Benin, on 23 April, the Government announced the withdrawal of its declaration on the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Establishment of an African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights, following the Court's ruling, on 17 April, requesting Benin to temporarily suspend the holding of



the local elections on 17 May, citing a lack of inclusivity. The Court had ruled on an injunction request submitted by the exiled businessman and opposition politician Sébastien Ajavon. Despite some calls for an opposition boycott, the elections were held relatively peacefully in all 77 communes with the participation of five political parties. According to the Autonomous National Electoral Commission, which announced the provisional results, two pro-Government parties, Union progressiste and Bloc républicain, obtained 39.97 and 37.38 per cent of the votes, respectively, and the opposition party Force Cauris pour un Bénin émergent received 14.98 per cent.

5. On 26 January, the Government of Burkina Faso announced the completion of the biometric registration of voters in the Burkinabe diaspora in 22 countries, ahead of the legislative and presidential elections planned for 22 November. In March, the Independent National Electoral Commission suspended the in-country voter registration process owing to COVID-19 until 8 May and is scheduled to end on 30 July.

6. In Côte d'Ivoire, on 6 March, the Government revised the composition of the Independent Electoral Commission, adding one seat for the opposition party Parti démocratique de Côte d'Ivoire – Rassemblement démocratique africain. However, opposition parties represented in the National Assembly rejected the proposal and continued to demand broader electoral reforms. On 5 March, the President, Alassane Ouattara, announced that he would not stand for re-election in October. On 19 March, he promulgated a new constitution, which required the Vice-President to be appointed by the President rather than elected on a joint ticket. On 22 April, the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights ruled that the Government suspend the execution of an arrest warrant issued on 23 December 2019 against the former Speaker of the National Assembly, Guillaume Soro, and release 19 of his supporters from prison. On 28 April, Mr. Soro was sentenced in absentia by a high court in Abidjan to 20 years' imprisonment and ordered to pay a fine of 4.5 billion CFA francs (about \$7.4 million) for embezzlement and money-laundering. On 29 April, the Government withdrew its declaration on the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Establishment of an African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights.

7. In the Gambia, on 30 March, the Constitutional Review Commission submitted the final draft constitution to the President, Adama Barrow, following broad-based national consultations. The proposal, inter alia, introduces a limit of two presidential terms and provisions limiting the executive authority of the President. A constitutional referendum should be held no later than six months prior to the next presidential election, in December 2021, or else the existing Constitution of 1997 will prevail. On 29 April, the Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission submitted its interim report to the Government. It concluded that violations and abuses committed during the previous regime were massive and included torture, unlawful killings, gender and sexual-based violence, enforced disappearances and arbitrary arrests and detention. The Commission's proceedings were suspended owing to COVID-19.

8. In Ghana, on 17 March, owing to restrictive measures established by the Government to contain the pandemic, the Electoral Commission temporarily suspended the voter registration process for the general elections scheduled for 7 December.

9. In Guinea, political tensions continued to rise ahead of the presidential election anticipated in October. On 22 March, legislative elections and a constitutional referendum were held. The main opposition parties boycotted the vote, claiming irregularities in the voter register and suspicion that the constitutional change was a ploy by the incumbent President to seek a third term. The elections were marred by violence in certain neighbourhoods of Conakry and other towns throughout the country. On 6 April, the President enacted the new Constitution, which, according to the Constitutional Court, was backed by 89.76 per cent of the electorate. The ruling

party, Rassemblement du peuple de Guinée, and its allies won 97 of the 114 seats in parliament; 18 newly elected representatives are women.

10. In Guinea-Bissau, on 1 January, the National Electoral Commission declared Umaro Sissoco Embaló the winner of the second round of the presidential election, held on 29 December 2019, against Domingos Simões Pereira. Mr. Pereira contested the results and filed a case with the Supreme Court of Justice. On 27 February, the legal process was interrupted by the self-investiture of Mr. Embaló. On 28 February, Mr. Embaló dismissed the Prime Minister, Aristides Gomes, replacing him with Nuno Gomes Nabiam. On 22 April, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) recognized Mr. Embaló as President and requested him to, among other things, appoint a prime minister and form a new Government no later than 22 May on the basis of the results of the legislative elections held in March 2019, in accordance with the Constitution. Amid competing claims by the political parties in the National People's Assembly regarding the parliamentary coalition that holds the majority, no progress has been made thus far to determine who takes the lead in appointing a prime minister and forming a government. An ordinary session of the Assembly is scheduled for 29 June to settle the matter.

11. In Liberia, on 6 May, the National Elections Commission announced that the holding of special senatorial elections and a constitutional referendum, which had been scheduled for 13 October, was not feasible owing to restrictive measures related to COVID-19. The Commission recommended that the President request the legislature to postpone the polls to a new date before the end of the year.

12. In Mali, the first and second rounds of the legislative elections were held on 29 March and 19 April, respectively, despite the pandemic, an increase in attacks by community-based militia in the centre and terrorist attacks on national and foreign security forces in central and northern Mali. The elections had low voter participation, 35 per cent in the first round and 23 per cent in the second. On 25 March, while campaigning, the leader of the opposition party Union pour la République et la démocratie, Soumaïla Cissé, was abducted by a Jihadist group. The Government has since established a crisis cell to coordinate efforts to liberate Mr. Cissé. In the aftermath of the contested legislative elections, rallies were held in Bamako on 5 and 19 June, gathering tens of thousands of people. The rallies included people from opposition parties and civil society organizations led by Imam Mahmoud Dicko, demanding the resignation of the President, Ibrahim Boubacar Keita. On 11 June, the Prime Minister, Boubou Cissé, tendered his resignation, but was reappointed by the President to form a government of "national unity". The Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Mali, Mahamat Saleh Annadif; representatives of the African Union; and ECOWAS in Mali engaged with Mr. Keita, Imam Dicko and other key stakeholders on measures to calm the situation.

13. In Mauritania, the President, Mohamed Ould Ghazouani, held several meetings with opposition leaders, which contributed to calming the political climate. On 14 February, a parliamentary commission of inquiry launched an investigation into the management of public assets under the tenure of the former President, Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz. On 10 March, a number of opponents of the former regime returned to Nouakchott.

14. In the Niger, preparations for the elections of November and December 2020 continued. However, on 30 March, the National Independent Electoral Commission suspended voter registration in Niamey in response to government measures to curb the spread of COVID-19. Outside Niamey, voter enrolment began on 3 April for the regions of Diffa, Maradi and Zinder. In the Agadez region, the postings of the provisional biometric electoral lists for possible claims began on 27 April. On 30 March, with a view to reducing the spread of the disease among inmates, the

President, Mahamadou Issoufou, granted amnesty to 1,540 prisoners, including the opposition leader Hama Amadou, who had served eight months of a one-year sentence.

15. In Nigeria, on 29 January, the House of Representatives passed a motion calling upon all military service chiefs to resign owing to the uptick in insecurity in the country and for the President, Muhammadu Buhari, to dismiss them if they failed to do so. The motion followed similar calls during debates in the Senate on the same day. On 6 February, the Independent National Electoral Commission announced that 75 of the 93 registered political parties in Nigeria had been deregistered for breaching regulations governing political parties. On 23 March, the Commission announced the suspension of its regular activities owing to the pandemic while also stating that the suspension would not affect its activities relating to the governorship elections in Edo and Ondo States, which are scheduled for September and October 2020, respectively.

16. In Senegal, the steering committee of the national dialogue held its first plenary session on 14 January. Eight thematic commissions were officially established, terms of reference validated and an agenda of meetings agreed on. However, owing to COVID-19, consultations were put on hold on 23 March.

17. In Sierra Leone, on 10 January, two ministers and two senior government officials were dismissed for alleged corruption related to the sale of several tons of donated rice on 14 August 2019 to support the school feeding programme across the country.

18. In Togo, the presidential election was held on 22 February. According to official results endorsed by the Constitutional Court, the incumbent President, Faure Essozimna Gnassingbé, obtained 70.78 per cent of the vote, followed by Agbéyomé Kodjo, with 19.46 per cent. Mr. Kodjo rejected the results. Following a request by the Public Prosecutor, Parliament lifted the immunity of Mr. Kodjo on 16 March. He and several officials of his party were arrested on 21 April on the grounds of undermining public order and State security and publishing false information. He has since been granted bail, pending the outcome of the judicial process. On 3 May, Mr. Gnassingbé was sworn in to office.

B. Security trends

19. The security situation in West Africa and the Sahel has continued to deteriorate. The region suffered recurring complex terrorist attacks on civilians and defence and security forces, as well as forced recruitment and abductions, in particular in Burkina Faso, Mali, the Niger and Nigeria. On 9 March, Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant encouraged its fighters to step up their attacks while governments were struggling to manage COVID-19. As defence and security forces continued to suffer casualties as a result of the attacks, communities resorted to self-defence militias for protection amid concerns about human rights abuses committed by the militias. While counter-terrorism operations carried out by national and multinational forces have produced successes, human rights actors have raised concerns about reports of human rights violations in the conduct of such operations.

20. The incidence of terrorist attacks in Burkina Faso remained high, affecting predominantly the Sahel and Centre-Nord regions. Militants affiliated with Ansar al-Islam, Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin and Islamic State in the Greater Sahara increased their attacks. The increase was matched by an increase in counter-terrorism operations by defence and security forces. On 10 March, in clashes in Tasmakatt, Oudalan Province, 70 attackers were killed by the Burkinabe armed forces. As a result of major attacks by unidentified armed groups on villages inhabited by Fulani herders in the North region, 24 civilians were killed and at least 18 wounded in Pansi in an attack on a church on 16 February; 39 civilians were killed in Silgadji, Soum

Province, on 25 February; and 43 civilians were killed in Barga and Dinguila. In addition, at least 15 civilians were killed in Zitenga, Bam Province, on 28 March. On 12 March, the French military, which led Operation Barkhane, announced that dozens of militants had been killed in northern Burkina Faso during joint operations with the national army. On 21 January, the Government passed a law on the recruitment, training and arming of civilians to complement security forces in community protection, prompting concerns about potential human rights abuses and increased intercommunal violence.

21. In Mali, terrorist attacks and violence along community lines continued. In an interview, on 10 February, President Keita acknowledged that a negotiated solution with terrorist groups was being explored. On 8 March, Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin conditioned negotiations with the Government of Mali on the departure of French troops. On 5 April, clashes between Islamic State in the Greater Sahara and Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin militants in Mopti resulted in more than 100 deaths. International military operations increased, with Operation Barkhane receiving pledged contributions, which are expected to be deployed by the end of 2020, from various European countries.

22. The security situation in the Diffa, Tahoua and Tillabéri regions of the Niger continued to be highly volatile. On 9 January, the Nigerien army suffered its deadliest attack yet at the Chinagodrar military post in Tillabéri, resulting in at least 89 casualties, in addition to the 77 casualties suffered by the terrorist group. The Nigerien army scaled up operations and security restrictions in the Tillabéri region after attacks by terrorist groups killed 174 Nigerien soldiers between December 2019 and January 2020. On 21 February, the Minister of Defence announced that a joint Nigerien-French operation had killed 120 terrorist fighters in the Tillabéri region. On 2 April, Islamic State in the Greater Sahara attacked an army post at Tamalaoulout, killing 4 soldiers, while 63 militants were killed by the army in the ensuing counteroffensive. On 16 March, the army killed at least 50 Boko Haram fighters after the fighters attacked a military post in Toumour, in the south-east. Overall, the number of offensive military operations carried out by the Nigerien army increased, with State sources reporting more than 620 militants killed within the first four months of 2020, compared with about 370 in the same period in 2019.

23. Nigeria faced security challenges on multiple fronts throughout the country. Boko Haram factions, including the so-called Islamic State West Africa Province and Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'Awati Wal-Jihad, remained a security threat in north-east Nigeria. On 23 March, at least 47 Nigerian soldiers in Gorgi village, Borno State, and some 98 Chadian soldiers on Boma island, in the Lake Chad basin, were killed in coordinated terrorist attacks. In a major military operation extended into the Niger and Nigeria, the Chadian army announced that, from 31 March to 8 April, it had pushed Boko Haram factions in Chad across the border, with several so-called Islamic State West Africa Province convoys observed travelling southward to various local government areas in Borno State. The Nigerian military then increased its operations. Between February and April, some 1,609 terrorist fighters and 375 defence and security forces were killed. Boko Haram factions were responsible for approximately 240 civilian deaths between 1 February and 15 April. Intercommunal violence, including farmer-herder clashes, continued. The country also continued to face high rates of kidnapping for ransom, communal violence and banditry attacks, with some 431 civilians killed between January and April. On 9 January, the six governors of South West Nigeria launched Operation Amotekun to curb insecurity. In a similar move, on 5 March, the South-South Governors Forum decided to create its own security outfit. To eliminate friction and enhance coordination and coherence, the governors agreed to align State-level security mechanisms with the community policing mechanisms of the federal Government.

24. The Gulf of Guinea remained a major piracy hotspot. The Interregional Coordination Centre for Maritime Safety and Security in the Gulf of Guinea recorded 34 incidents of piracy in the first quarter of 2020, compared with 31 incidents in the last quarter of 2019, indicating a marginal upward trend. Of the 34 incidents, 25 occurred in the ECOWAS maritime space, while 9 occurred in the maritime space of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS). As in the previous reporting period, the International Maritime Bureau reported that attacks occur increasingly beyond 70 nautical miles at sea.

25. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, drug seizures in West Africa were on the rise, reflecting both increased supply and strengthened interdiction capacities. On 28 January, Senegalese authorities discovered 120 kg of cocaine hidden in a container ship that was under seizure at the port of Dakar. On 3 February, Côte d'Ivoire seized 405 kg of cocaine in Abidjan, on board a ship. On 3 April, the regional tribunal of Bissau sentenced 12 persons to jail terms ranging from 4 to 16 years and ordered the confiscation of assets worth more than \$500,000 for their involvement in trafficking following the seizure of 1.8 tons of cocaine on 3 September 2019. In February, the Ivorian police rescued 153 victims of exploitation, forced labour and domestic servitude.

C. Sustainable development trends

26. The pandemic threatens the reversal of important strides made in recent years in economic growth, poverty reduction and the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in West Africa and the Sahel. According to the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), the outbreak will worsen the current human security crisis in the Sahel region owing to the combination of poverty, climate change, low human development and conflict. Furthermore, the pandemic has struck against a background of stagnating progress in the subregion towards the Sustainable Development Goals, with Goal 3 (good health and well-being) and Goal 9 (industry, innovation and infrastructure) being pressing concerns.

27. The closure of schools to prevent the spread of COVID-19 has had profound consequences for education in the region and, ultimately, for the job market and the economy. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) estimates that some 119 million children and 4 million teachers are affected in West and Central Africa.

28. ECA estimates that the growth rate of Nigeria, the largest economy in the subregion, could decline from an initial projection of 2.9 per cent to -3.4 per cent in 2020 owing to the pandemic. Assuming that there will be an effect similar to that of the financial crisis of 2008, ECA posits that remittances to West Africa and the Sahel will fall, from \$35.5 billion in 2019 to an estimated \$27.3 billion in 2020. Tourism, which is a key contributor to gross domestic product and employment in the region, may in an optimistic scenario fall by 25 per cent, as was the case during the Ebola crisis, or it may decline by as much as 50 per cent because of the pandemic. The prospects for recovery will depend on the measures implemented by States and the international support that will allow economies to resume their production potential in the post-crisis period.

D. Humanitarian trends

29. The rapid escalation of the crisis in the Sahel has driven humanitarian needs throughout the region, which could be further exacerbated by the spread of the disease, to unprecedented levels. According to the Office for the Coordination of

Humanitarian Affairs, in 2020, a new record high of 24 million Sahelians will need humanitarian assistance and protection. According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, West Africa and the Sahel host 870,000 refugees and 4.9 million internally displaced persons. The United Nations Population Fund projects that some 6.5 million women and young people will need humanitarian support, including sexual and reproductive health and gender-based violence services, in the subregion in 2020.

30. In West Africa and the Sahel, 19.1 million persons are projected to be food-insecure during the lean season, June to August, a 77 per cent increase compared with 2019 and the highest in a decade. Food insecurity, whose hotspots include southern Mauritania and northern Senegal, the Lake Chad basin and the central Sahel, is mainly a result of the persistence of conflict and insecurity, leading to displacement, dysfunctional social infrastructure, the destabilization of market and economic flows and the disruption of livelihoods.

31. In Burkina Faso, the humanitarian situation deteriorated sharply over the past year. According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, as at April, 848,000 persons had been forced to flee their homes, an increase of 67 per cent compared with late 2019. More than 60 per cent of the internally displaced are children. More than 135 health centres and 2,500 schools are closed owing to insecurity, depriving 338,000 children and young people of access to education and millions of persons of access to essential health care.

32. In Mali, growing instability has led to a new surge in internal displacement. Nearly 220,000 persons, 54 per cent of whom are women, are displaced within the country. In March, more than 11,000 newly displaced persons fleeing attacks were registered in Mopti, central Mali. During the lean season, 1.3 million persons will face starvation or be threatened by food insecurity. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs projects that, in 2020, 4.3 million persons will need humanitarian assistance, more than 1 million more than in early 2019.

33. In the Niger, the humanitarian situation in the Tahoua and Tillabéri regions worsened significantly, and the situation in Diffa remained highly insecure and volatile. As at February, 441,000 persons had been forced to flee their homes. The number included some 103,000 internally displaced persons and 126,000 Nigerian refugees in Diffa, 109,000 internally displaced persons and 55,000 Malian refugees in Tillabéri and Tahoua and 36,000 Nigerian refugees and 12,000 internally displaced persons in Maradi. The ongoing application of state of emergency rules and military operations in those three regions has continued to limit humanitarian access to some locations. In April, 10,000 persons fled I-n-Atès and its surrounding villages in Tillabéri region owing to violence and the worsening humanitarian situation.

34. In Nigeria, the humanitarian community estimates that 7.7 million persons will need emergency assistance in 2020. More than 1.8 million persons, more than half of them women, in Adamawa, Borno and Yobe states still live in camps or are hosted in communities that are themselves extremely vulnerable. Multiple attacks by non-State armed groups continued to trigger new displacements. Influxes were recorded in the Borno state capital of Maiduguri, where resources and facilities were stretched to capacity. In North East Nigeria, humanitarian access remained limited owing to the highly militarized environment. An estimated 1.2 million persons in need in areas not under the control of the Nigerian military were deprived of life-saving aid.

35. The resurgence of armed attacks in the Lake Chad basin continued to drive displacement and disrupt relief operations throughout Cameroon, Chad, the Niger and Nigeria. Some 2.7 million persons have fled their homes, including 2.4 million internally displaced persons and 292,000 Nigerian refugees.

36. The pandemic has the potential to overwhelm fragile health systems in the region, hitting women in particular, as well as marginalized and vulnerable groups, the hardest. The outbreak risks aggravating existing health system challenges and creating additional needs in areas already ravaged by conflict and facing dramatic new spikes in food insecurity. In addition to existing humanitarian response plans, there is an updated Global Humanitarian Response Plan for COVID-19, which was issued in May and includes an appeal for \$640 million to fight the disease in the countries of the Sahel. Across the Sahel, humanitarian partners require \$2.5 billion to provide life-saving assistance and protection to 17 million persons. The scaling up of the response has been hampered by a lack of funding, however. As at the end of April, only 15 per cent of the required amount had been received.

E. Trends in human rights

37. Systematic attacks by violent extremists on civilians; intercommunal and electoral violence; the excessive and disproportionate use of force by security forces; and restrictions on the freedoms of assembly and of the press, in a climate of impunity, affected respect for human rights and the rule of law in West Africa and the Sahel.

38. Notwithstanding increased pressure from defence and security forces, violent extremists continued to carry out fatal attacks on civilians. On 10 February, 30 persons, including a pregnant woman and a baby, were killed when Boko Haram set ablaze 18 vehicles and their occupants in Auno, about 20 km from Maiduguri, Borno state. The United Nations continued to receive reports of human rights violations when counter-terrorism operations are conducted. They included the alleged burning down of houses in Borno state by Nigerian security forces on 3 and 4 January, the alleged killing of civilians by Malian defence forces between January and April, the alleged killing of civilians by Nigerien security forces between 27 March and 2 April and the alleged killing of 31 men by the security forces of Burkina Faso on 9 April in the town of Djibo, 200 km north of Ouagadougou.

39. Electoral and intercommunal violence continued to affect the protection of human rights, including the rights to life and physical integrity. In Guinea, electoral violence resulted in at least 31 deaths, with scores wounded during protracted demonstrations against the constitutional revision process. Accountability for human rights abuses is still lacking in the context of intercommunal violence in Burkina Faso, Guinea and Mali, fuelling the cycle of violence.

40. Human rights actors have called for greater accountability and a human rights-based approach in the response to the pandemic. On 15 April, the National Human Rights Commission of Nigeria reported 18 fatalities and other violations allegedly committed by security forces and the correctional services. In Ghana, Guinea-Bissau and Senegal, human rights actors reported the use of force and alleged punitive measures by security forces with regard to civilians for non-compliance with mitigation efforts to limit the spread of COVID-19. The arrest of protesters in the Gambia and Liberia, as well as of human rights activists and bloggers in Mauritania, raised concerns about the exercise of fundamental freedoms. Of concern were a lack of health-care services and limited access to health facilities, in particular in remote areas and conflict zones, as well as a disproportionate social and economic toll taken on vulnerable and marginalized groups owing to the confinement measures.

41. In Benin, on 22 February, a court barred a former Prime Minister and presidential candidate, Lionel Zinsou, from standing for elections for a period of five years on charges of having allegedly exceeded campaign expenses during the 2016 presidential election. Human rights actors have called for the expedited extradition of François Compaoré from France to Burkina Faso to answer to pending charges. At

least 5,584 detainees were released through presidential pardons in response to COVID-19 in the Niger, Senegal and Togo.

F. Trends in gender and youth issues

42. Participation and representation in political and peace processes, as well as in security services in the subregion, remained low. However, in a positive development, concrete measures are being taken to promote the political participation of women. In Burkina Faso, a 30 per cent quota for women candidates in legislative and local elections was set through a new electoral law, and in Liberia, two women were appointed as Chair of the National Elections Commission and as Head of the National Civil Society Council of Liberia, respectively. In Mali, in keeping with the Law on Gender of 2015, through which a 30 per cent quota for women in elective positions was instituted, 42 women were elected to the 142-seat parliament in the legislative elections, held from March to April, compared with 14 in the previous legislature.

43. Despite continuous attacks, kidnappings and sexual and gender-based violence targeting women in areas affected by terrorism, such as the Sahel and the Lake Chad basin, countries in the subregion continued their efforts to promote the protection of women and young people. In Senegal, following a unanimous vote by parliament on 31 December 2019, the President, Macky Sall, promulgated a law on 10 January fully criminalizing acts of rape and paedophilia.

44. To promote the youth and peace and security agenda, countries took steps towards involving young women and men in political processes. In Cabo Verde, for example, on 14 February, the Prime Minister swore in 20 representatives of young people, 10 of whom were women, to serve for two years on the Youth Advisory Council, a platform through which young people engage with and advise the prime minister.

45. Since the outbreak, women, in particular civil society members, have mobilized support for vulnerable groups. The imposition of lockdowns, border closures and restrictive measures is expected to severely affect the informal sector, which is constituted mainly by women, possibly exacerbating existing vulnerabilities. The outbreak may also result in increased sexual and gender-based violence and attacks on female health workers and expose girls to additional exploitation and abuse.

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

A. Good offices and special assignments of my Special Representative

46. My Special Representative for West Africa and the Sahel continued to support national and regional efforts to sustain peace, in collaboration with regional and international partners, including through advocacy and support for inclusive approaches to national dialogues and electoral processes, the promotion of human rights and constitutional and institutional reforms. He has also been advocating a response in the subregion to my call for a global ceasefire amid the pandemic.

47. From 13 to 17 January, my Special Representative accompanied the Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs to Burkina Faso, Guinea-Bissau, the Niger and Senegal, where she met those countries' Heads of State and a variety of stakeholders. She also met the President of the ECOWAS Commission in Nigeria and the Executive Secretary of the Secretariat of the G5 Sahel in the Niger.

The visit was aimed at supporting ongoing initiatives to enhance democratic consolidation, security, sustainable development and peace in the subregion.

48. My Special Representative visited Guinea on two separate occasions (on 26 and 27 January and from 9 to 11 March), during which he urged Guineans to find a peaceful solution to the prevailing political crisis through consensual and constructive dialogue.

49. My Special Representative visited the Niger on 16 and 17 March, where he exchanged information on developments in the subregion, including with Mr. Issoufou, the current Chair of the ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State and Government.

50. My Special Representative visited Lomé from 23 to 28 January, to consult with relevant actors ahead of the country's presidential election. In collaboration with the ECOWAS Commission, UNOWAS organized a workshop to promote peaceful elections and enhance exchanges among relevant national stakeholders. My Special Representative emphasized the need for a peaceful, credible, transparent and inclusive electoral process underpinned by respect for the rule of law and human rights.

B. Sustaining peace

51. The United Nations system continued to scale up its presence in Burkina Faso through five integrated offices, in Bobo-Dioulasso, Dori, Fada Ngourma, Kaya and Ouahigouya. On 5 March, the Peacebuilding Commission convened a meeting on peacebuilding and sustaining peace in Burkina Faso to help to mobilize adequate and coherent international support for the Government's peacebuilding priorities.

C. Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission

52. The pandemic had a serious impact on the activities of the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission, slowing the momentum generated by the contribution of \$6 million by Cameroon and Nigeria to the demarcation trust fund.

53. The procurement process for the construction of the remaining 1,352 boundary pillars was finalized. An inspection mission for lot 4B was completed, and the commencement of project execution for lot 5 was planned for April. However, owing to restrictions related to COVID-19, field operations were temporarily suspended. Mediation meetings to resolve outstanding areas of disagreement and the final mapping were also postponed.

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

54. UNOWAS continued to enhance its collaboration with regional partners and United Nations country teams on issues that included conflict prevention, women and young people, climate change, human rights, the rule of law and security.

55. In January, the United Nations Development Programme deployed a senior adviser to the permanent secretariat of the G5 Sahel to support institutional capacity-building. In April, UNOWAS and the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs recruited a planning specialist to boost the implementation of the action plan of the Mauritanian presidency of the G5 Sahel, as was done during the preceding Burkinabe presidency. Moreover, they continued to support the establishment of the Sahelian Threat Analysis and Early Warning Centre, based in Ouagadougou.

56. On 11 and 12 February, UNOWAS and the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa (UNOCA) held their annual desk-to-desk meeting, in Libreville. They identified initiatives to support regional partners, strengthen interregional cooperation and address common challenges, including terrorism and the spread of violent extremism, maritime insecurity and organized crime, the adverse effects of climate change, farmer-herder conflicts and governance deficits.

57. On 25 February, my Special Representative participated in the sixth annual summit of the G5 Sahel Heads of State, held in Nouakchott. The need for the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali to continue to provide logistical support to the Joint Force of the G5 Sahel was reiterated at the summit. For that purpose, a revised tripartite agreement among the United Nations, the European Union and the G5 Sahel was signed at the summit. In order to strengthen the capacity of the G5 Sahel, the permanent secretariat was transformed into an executive secretariat, and a new integrated priority initiatives framework, which comprised a number of stabilization projects in vulnerable, conflict-affected regions, was endorsed.

58. From 10 to 12 March, UNOWAS attended the second Liptako-Gourma Authority Governors' Forum, held in Bamako. The Forum adopted a formal framework for cooperation.

59. Within the framework of the Declaration of the G5 Sahel Countries on Countering Radicalization and Violent Extremism in the Sahel, the United Nations continued to support the Regional Cell for the Prevention of Radicalization and Violent Extremism and its national units. In that regard, UNOWAS, in collaboration with the International Organization for Migration, supported the Regional Cell and the Ministry of Islamic Affairs and Original Education of Mauritania in developing an action plan to promote the prevention of violent extremism in that country.

60. On 23 April, my Special Representative participated in an extraordinary videoconference session of the ECOWAS Authority on the pandemic and conveyed the solidarity of the United Nations with the governments and people of the subregion. The Authority appointed the President of Nigeria, Muhammadu Buhari, as Champion to lead the regional COVID-19 response efforts and to set up, under his supervision, ministerial coordination committees on health, finance and transport to coordinate regional efforts to address the outbreak.

61. UNOWAS, in consultation with resident coordinators, carried out an analysis of the potential impact of COVID-19 on peace and security in West Africa and the Sahel, as well as of the impact of the disease on the implementation of the UNOWAS mandate. In the analysis, various regional and country-level scenarios were identified and actions suggested.

Conflicts between herders and farmers

62. On 10 and 11 February, UNOWAS and ECOWAS jointly organized, in collaboration with the Institute for Security Studies, a workshop on good practices in preventing and resolving farmer-herder conflicts. The workshop, which was held in Abuja, brought together key stakeholders from Ghana, Guinea, Mali, Nigeria and Senegal. Participants decided to set up a regional network of practitioners and civil society organizations on farmer-herder conflicts, in collaboration with the West African Civil Society Forum. Subsequently, UNOWAS produced a handbook on good practices stemming from local conflict prevention and dispute resolution mechanisms.

63. UNOWAS continued to chair the regional working group on the prevention and resolution of farmer-herder conflicts, which includes regional United Nations partners

and selected non-governmental organizations. On 15 April, during a session of the working group, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and UNOWAS agreed to enhance joint efforts to strengthen the role and participation of women and young people as peacebuilders in community-driven development in agricultural and pastoral production.

Lake Chad basin

64. On 4 March, my Special Representative facilitated a meeting between the Executive Secretary of the Lake Chad Basin Commission and Head of the Multinational Joint Task Force and the Regional United Nations Sustainable Development Group, held in Dakar, to discuss the Regional Stabilization, Recovery and Resilience Strategy for Areas Affected by Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Basin Region. The meeting was aimed at developing a common understanding of the role of United Nations agencies in the implementation of the Regional Strategy and ensuring coherence with existing regional programmes, including the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel.

Cross-border security strategy in the Mano River Union

65. On 19 February, UNOWAS and the Mano River Union signed a framework of cooperation agreement that endorsed the joint workplan elaborated in November 2019 in Freetown. The agreement is focused on peace and security-related issues and support for young people and women across the borders.

Piracy in the Gulf of Guinea

66. Within the framework of Security Council resolution [2039 \(2012\)](#), UNOWAS and UNOCA continued to support regional efforts to enhance collaboration to counter maritime insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea. My Special Representative for West Africa and the Sahel and my Special Representative for Central Africa and Head of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa undertook a joint visit to the Interregional Coordination Centre for Maritime Safety and Security in the Gulf of Guinea, in Yaoundé, and to the Gulf of Guinea Commission, in Luanda, from 4 to 6 and from 6 to 8 February, respectively. They assessed the implementation of the regional strategy for maritime safety and security in West and Central Africa with a view to identifying specific areas that the United Nations could support and where synergies between the two subregions should be enhanced. My Special Representatives reaffirmed the readiness of the United Nations to provide support to, and work closely with, ECOWAS and ECCAS. My Special Representative for West Africa and the Sahel continued to advocate the operationalization of maritime zone G, which had yet to reach its full capacity.

Terrorism and violent extremism

67. From 3 to 5 February, UNOWAS supported the third plenary meeting of the Capacity-building in the West Africa Region Working Group of the Global Counterterrorism Forum, held in Lomé. The meeting, with support from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, brought together West African and international stakeholders to take stock of implementation, cooperation and capacity-building efforts in priority areas with regard to preventing and countering terrorism and violent extremism.

Adverse implications of climate change

68. On 3 March, my Deputy Special Representative for West Africa and the Sahel delivered the keynote speech at a UN75 subregional meeting on multilateral

cooperation to address climate-related security and development risks in Africa, held in Dakar. She highlighted the role of climate change as a risk multiplier that exacerbated existing security concerns and called for reinforced multilateral cooperation including support for regional peacebuilding approaches, as part of the response.

Security sector reform

69. UNOWAS continued to support security sector reform processes in the subregion. On 18 January, my Special Representative and the Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs discussed with the President of Burkina Faso, Roch Marc Christian Kaboré, ongoing efforts to reform national security, which the United Nations has been supporting. From 16 to 20 March, UNOWAS undertook a technical mission to Burkina Faso to assess progress towards security sector reform and define areas of support with regard to the Senior Security Sector Reform Adviser to the President.

70. In the Gambia, the United Nations country team, with support from the Peacebuilding Fund, continued its efforts towards integrated support for security sector reform at the programmatic level. A security sector reform programme framework is being elaborated as the next phase of United Nations support for the Government's process.

71. Against a backdrop of sociopolitical tension in Guinea regarding the constitutional referendum and legislative polls, the United Nations continued to support the implementation of the Government's national security sector reform process through capacity-building for defence and security forces in the areas of the penal chain, forensic services and the use of drones on security missions.

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

72. While programmes continued to be implemented under the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel, the pandemic forced the United Nations response to be adjusted. Joint programming continued in the Liptako-Gourma area despite increasing difficulty of access owing to the security situation. With regard to the operationalization of the implementation support unit, recruitment of the programme coordinator was finalized. The Food and Agricultural Organization, the World Food Programme, the United Nations Development Programme, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Office of Counter-Terrorism, the International Labour Organization and UNESCO have either deployed technical expertise or nominated focal points to build capacity, in line with the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel and the road map for cooperation between the G5 Sahel and the United Nations of June 2015. Areas of United Nations support for the G5 Sahel include project formulation and implementation, planning, field assessment and advocacy.

73. The meeting of the Ministerial Coordination Platform for the Sahel, scheduled to be held in Niamey in the first half of 2020, was rescheduled for the end of 2020. Bilateral discussions were held between my Special Representative and Sahel stakeholders, including special envoys and regional organizations, on the situation in the region.

74. On 28 April, Mr. Ghazouani co-chaired a meeting of the G5 Sahel with the President of the European Council. The Deputy Secretary-General and the President of the African Union Commission were also in attendance. In a joint declaration, four

pillars of the partnership between the G5 Sahel and the European Union were established: combating terrorist groups; strengthening the capacities of armed forces; supporting State authority, including through strengthening the penal chain; and coordinating development actors through the Alliance for the Sahel.

75. On 21 July, I will report to the Economic and Social Council on progress on the implementation of integrated, coherent and coordinated support to the Sahel by the United Nations system, outlining the main developments pursued under the auspices of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel, as operationalized by the Regional United Nations Sustainable Development Group through the United Nations Support Plan for the Sahel.

F. Promotion of good governance, respect for the rule of law, human rights and gender mainstreaming

76. On 16 January, UNOWAS participated in the commemoration of ECOWAS Human Rights Day in Abuja. At the event, which was attended by the ECOWAS Commission and key partners, including human rights and humanitarian organizations, national institutions and the diplomatic corps, civil society and non-governmental organizations, a platform was presented for advocacy of the right to education, as well as for ways of addressing the main human rights challenges in the region.

77. On 2 and 3 March, UNOWAS participated in a regional seminar with UN-Women and the Ambassador of Canada, held in Dakar, inaugurating a two-year exhibition on African women and political leadership. At the seminar, stock was taken of the political participation of women in the region, with a special focus on enhancing legal reforms and the functioning of political parties to promote the effective political participation of women in the Central African Republic, Guinea, Liberia and Nigeria. Participants established a regional mechanism, which will be supported by UNOWAS and ECOWAS, through which to follow up on legal reforms and facilitate experience-sharing and advocacy with regard to the representation and participation of women in elections.

78. Through videoconferences, UNOWAS facilitated three thematic exchange sessions of the Working Group on Women, Youth, Peace and Security in West Africa and the Sahel, on the impact of COVID-19 on gender and the women and peace and security agenda; the new mandate of UNOWAS and its implication for the women and peace and security agenda in West Africa and the Sahel; and the assessment of the 20 years of implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) in the subregion. Participants committed themselves to reinforcing synergies to collect monthly gender-disaggregated data on the disease in the region and called upon UNOWAS and other United Nations entities to increase support for initiatives for women and young people.

IV. Observations and recommendations

79. I welcome the positive developments in West Africa and the Sahel, such as the relatively peaceful conduct of the presidential election in Togo and the completion of the work of the Constitutional Review Commission in the Gambia.

80. I take note of the holding of legislative elections and a constitutional referendum in Guinea amid tensions and violence, which, regrettably, led to the loss of life. I urge all political actors to engage in inclusive dialogue in order to find peaceful solutions to their differences ahead of the presidential election.

81. As preparations for elections continue in Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea and the Niger, I urge all relevant political stakeholders to build consensus around those critical processes, in particular in the context of the current health crisis, in order to ensure inclusive, transparent, credible and peaceful outcomes.

82. I am deeply concerned about the impact of the pandemic on the peace, stability and socioeconomic development of the countries of West Africa and the Sahel. I reiterate my appeal for an immediate global ceasefire to reinforce diplomatic action, as well as for debt relief and help in creating conditions for the delivery of life-saving aid and bringing hope to places that are among the most vulnerable to the outbreak.

83. I salute the efforts of ECOWAS Member States to prevent and limit the spread of COVID-19 and welcome the holding of the extraordinary session of the ECOWAS Authority on the pandemic on 23 April. I urge subregional leaders to ensure inclusivity and consensus regarding decisions taken on measures to address the outbreak while maintaining a focus on other pressing threats to peace and security, as well as socioeconomic and development challenges facing the subregion.

84. I remain concerned about the rise in intercommunity violence, as well as its implications for security and respect for human rights in West Africa and the Sahel, and urge the countries of the region to speed up efforts to strengthen community-based dispute resolution mechanisms while ensuring full accountability for crimes committed during intercommunal clashes.

85. I note with concern the increase in terrorist activity in the Sahel and in the Lake Chad basin, which has caused mass displacement, reduced access to basic services, in particular health and education, and disrupted livelihoods, with serious humanitarian consequences. I urge countries of the region to redouble their efforts to address the root causes through a more integrated approach, encompassing humanitarian assistance, development aid and security and human rights dimensions. I call upon countries of the region to enhance their investments in human development and the promotion of social cohesion. Response programmes have to be conflict-sensitive and attuned to the underlying causes of instability to avoid worsening the situation. I also urge international partners to make good on their pledges and expedite disbursement to support regional efforts.

86. I commend the efforts of countries participating in the Multinational Joint Task Force and the Joint Force of the G5 Sahel to address security challenges in the subregion. I encourage the countries to enhance their coordination and reiterate my call for international partners to continue to scale up support for those initiatives.

87. I urge Member States to intensify efforts towards addressing the root causes of insecurity in the subregion and reducing the populations' need to rely on armed vigilante and militia groups as security providers. I call upon partners to fully support holistic and integrated approaches to addressing those challenges, including through the implementation of the stabilization strategy for countries affected by the Boko Haram crisis, the G5 Sahel priority investment plan, the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel and its Support Plan for the Sahel.

88. I encourage national, regional and international partners to redouble their efforts towards responding to current and projected threats posed by worsening climate change, which could further exacerbate the volatile situation in the Lake Chad basin and the Sahel.

89. I am deeply concerned about the continued limiting of humanitarian access in the Lake Chad basin and in the Liptako-Gourma tri-border region, which has resulted increasingly in unnecessary human suffering. I call upon the parties concerned to respect the humanitarian principles of impartiality and neutrality and allow the

unhindered delivery of humanitarian assistance to populations in need, in particular children, older persons, women and other vulnerable groups.

90. I welcome efforts made by some countries to enhance the participation of women and young people in national peace, security, development and COVID-19 response strategies. I urge countries in the subregion to take specific measures, in accordance with their national and regional commitments, to enhance inclusive processes and political, social and economic opportunities for women and young people.

91. The United Nations will continue to support Member States in enhancing their institutional and operational frameworks for the promotion and protection of human rights and the rule of law. I urge Member States to take concrete steps to enhance respect for human rights, in particular during electoral processes and counter-terrorism operations, while ensuring accountability for violations and abuses. With regard to the pandemic, I urge Member States to adopt a human rights-based approach in their response, which is essential to guarantee that societies emerge more resilient thereafter.

92. I commend the Governments of Cameroon and Nigeria for their continuous commitment to completing the demarcation of their land and maritime boundaries. I encourage them to expedite the process with a view to accelerating the completion of the mandate of the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission once the challenges caused by the pandemic have been addressed.

93. I wish to express my appreciation to the Governments of West Africa and the Sahel region, the African Union, ECOWAS, the G5 Sahel, the Mano River Union, the Gulf of Guinea Commission and the Lake Chad Basin Commission for their continued cooperation with UNOWAS. I also extend my appreciation to the United Nations system in West Africa and the Sahel, civil society organizations and other institutions for their close partnership with UNOWAS. I commend and further encourage the close collaboration between UNOCA and UNOWAS on an increasing range of topical and transversal challenges, which reflects and responds proactively to the enhanced cooperation between ECCAS and ECOWAS. I would like to express particular appreciation to my Special Representative, Mohamed ibn Chambas, as well as the staff of UNOWAS and the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission, for their continuing efforts to advance peace and security in West Africa and the Sahel.
