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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 23 June 2022 to 30 December 2022 and 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). It also highlights progress made in the implementation of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel, and includes 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. During the reporting period, some Member States in West Africa and the Sahel continued working towards the consolidation of their democracies while others continued to contend with the challenges of insecurity, democratic consolidation and good governance, as well as worsening humanitarian crises. Peaceful legislative elections were held in Senegal in July. In Côte d'Ivoire, efforts to implement the agreed outcomes of the political dialogue which concluded in March 2022, as well as to promote social cohesion and reconciliation, continued. In Nigeria, ahead of the general elections scheduled for 2023, presidential contenders signed a peace pledge, committing to a peaceful and issue-based electoral campaign. Meanwhile, ahead of their upcoming legislative and general elections, Guinea-Bissau and Sierra Leone continued to grapple with sociopolitical tensions. Against this backdrop, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), with support from the United Nations, continued to engage in efforts to ensure the peaceful restoration of constitutional order in Burkina Faso, Guinea and Mali.

3. The security situation in large parts of the Sahel continued to deteriorate. The number of victims and casualties of violence, including women and children, has increased. Threats of a spread of terrorism southward to coastal West African States continued. For the first time, civilians were targeted in Togo, while Benin suffered another attack in its northern region, for which Islamic State in the Greater Sahara claimed responsibility. In addition, for the first time, an individual reportedly affiliated with Boko Haram was captured in the Upper East Region of northern Ghana. To address these challenges, some Member States of the subregion have deepened



their cooperation under the Accra Initiative, which was established in 2017 in response to increased security threats to coastal West African States, stemming from the spread of terrorism and transnational organized crime.

4. The humanitarian situation, especially in the central Sahel, remained dire and was compounded by rising food and energy prices, as well as climate-related disasters, prompted by heavy rainfall, floods and water pollution.

5. Some progress was made in the reporting period on transitional justice and in the fight against impunity, although concerns regarding shrinking civic and political space persisted in some countries of the subregion. Furthermore, no significant progress was recorded in terms of women's representation and participation in decision-making processes.

A. Politics and governance

6. In Benin, all major political parties have agreed to take part in the legislative elections scheduled to be held on 8 January 2023. The President of Benin, Patrice Talon, met with his predecessors Nicéphore Soglo and Thomas Yayi Boni, as well as with opposition political leaders. These gestures contributed to reducing political tensions which had afflicted the country in the aftermath of the previous parliamentary and presidential elections. Furthermore, several opposition leaders who had been detained in the context of the presidential elections held in April 2021 were released. However, prominent opposition leaders, including Reckya Madougou and Joel Aivo, remain incarcerated.

7. In Burkina Faso, several demonstrations took place on 7 July against the visit of former President Blaise Compaoré, who had returned to the country for the first time since his exile in November 2014, at the invitation of the then-transition President Lieutenant Colonel Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba. On 30 September, a faction of the Mouvement patriotique pour la sauvegarde et la restauration headed by Captain Ibrahim Traoré overthrew the transitional President, Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba, in a second coup d'état, following the one in January 2022. On 14 October, a national conference adopted a transition charter with a 21-month transition timeline. On 20 October, Captain Traoré was sworn in as President of the transition.

8. In Cabo Verde, inclusive consultations among all major political actors were held on a revision of the electoral code and other reforms, including the integration of gender in government policy planning and implementation. Similarly, appointments to the judiciary, the media regulatory authority and the national electoral commission were supported by a cross-party consensus.

9. In Côte d'Ivoire, for the first time since the 2010–2011 post-electoral crisis, on 14 July, President Alassane Ouattara met with former President Laurent Gbagbo of the Parti des peuples africains – Côte d'Ivoire, and former President Henri Konan Bédié of the Parti démocratique de Côte d'Ivoire-Rassemblement démocratique africain. The meeting further contributed to the creation of an environment conducive to national reconciliation.

10. In the Gambia, the Government that was appointed after the April legislative elections, resumed the democratic reform process which had been initiated by the previous legislature. The Government also undertook efforts to advance the transitional justice process. Nevertheless, victims' organizations have criticized the slow implementation of the recommendations contained in the report of the Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission. Meanwhile, the Inter-Party Committee promoted initiatives to foster inclusivity ahead of the local elections scheduled for May 2023. The Committee provided, inter alia, a platform for dialogue among

political parties and is elaborating a policy by which all parties would commit to including women, youth and persons with disabilities in internal party decision-making structures and candidate lists.

11. In Ghana, disagreements persisted between the Electoral Commission and the main opposition party, the New Democratic Congress, over the decision of the Commission to use the national identity card as the sole identification document to update the electoral register ahead of the general elections in 2024. On 5 August, considering threats of a spillover of insecurity from Sahel countries, the President of Ghana, Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo, made new appointments to the national security leadership. Meanwhile, public discontent over the protracted economic crisis in the country prompted a mass protest on 5 October.

12. In Guinea, protracted disagreements over the content and duration of the transition deepened divisions between the authorities and main political and civil society actors. Dialogue attempts undertaken by the Government remained ineffective, owing to a lack of trust between the parties, compounded by allegations of politically motivated judicial action targeting civil society and opposition figures. On 8 August, the authorities dissolved the Front national pour la défense de la Constitution, a platform of political parties, trade unions and civil society actors, which staged several protests during the reporting period to demand an inclusive and timely transition process. During these protests, at least 12 civilians were killed. Against this backdrop, at its 62nd ordinary session, the ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State and Government welcomed the 24-month transition timeline jointly developed by the Guinean authorities and ECOWAS experts. The Authority further noted that the 24-month transition should start immediately and called for inclusive political dialogue.

13. In Guinea-Bissau, preparations for early legislative elections, initially scheduled for 18 December, faced logistical and financial challenges compounded by the lack of consensus among the main political actors over key election-related issues. During consultations organized by the Government on 17 October, political parties insisted on the need for a new voter registration system for the elections. They also questioned the constitutional legality of the National Electoral Commission, given the expiration of its four-year mandate in April and the appointment of two of its four-member secretariat as judges to the Supreme Court of Justice and the Court of Auditors, respectively. The consultations culminated in a proposal by the Government to the President to postpone the elections to May 2023 for technical and financial reasons. On 16 December, the President of Guinea-Bissau, Umaro Sissoco Embaló, signed a decree setting the date of the elections for 4 June 2023. Meanwhile, voter registration started on 10 December.

14. In Liberia, preparations continued for the general elections scheduled to be held in October 2023 in a calm but polarized environment. The Election Law Reform Bill stipulating a 30 per cent quota for women in senatorial and parliamentary elections was adopted by the House of Representatives and the Senate. Amid allegations of corruption related to non-compliance with procurement regulations, the supply of biometric voter registration equipment has experienced delays.

15. In Mali, an agreement between the authorities and ECOWAS on the extension of the duration of the transition led to the partial lifting of the sanctions imposed on the country by the subregional organization. In another development, following the detention by Malian authorities of 49 soldiers from Côte d'Ivoire who were arrested at the airport in Bamako on 10 July, there have been robust regional and international efforts aimed at mediating their release. In August, the President of Togo, Faure Essozimna Gnassingbé, initiated diplomatic talks to that end. On 3 September, 3 of the 49 soldiers – all women – were released.

16. In Mauritania, in a meeting organized by the Minister of the Interior and Decentralization on 26 September, 24 of the 25 registered political parties signed an agreement on the conditions for the holding of legislative, regional and municipal elections in 2023. The Alliance for Justice and Democracy/Movement for Renewal boycotted the meeting. On 31 October, the 11 members of the National Independent Electoral Commission were appointed, including five members from the opposition.

17. In the Niger, on 9 September, opposition leader Tahirou Saidou and other opposition representatives participated in a session of the Conseil national de dialogue politique, which had been boycotted by the opposition since 2016. The Conseil national de dialogue politique expressed support for the security forces and discussed the preparations by the National Independent Electoral Commission to hold legislative by-elections for the five vacant diaspora seats at the National Assembly. On 14 October, the Prime Minister, Mahamadou Ouhoumoudou, established a committee representing the majority, opposition, and non-aligned parties to revise the functioning of the Conseil national de dialogue politique. Meanwhile, the civil society coalition Mouvement M62, staged several demonstrations against the presence of international forces and rising inflation in the country.

18. In Nigeria, preparations for the presidential, parliamentary, gubernatorial and state assembly elections to be held in February and March 2023 proceeded in a relatively calm environment. The campaigns for the presidential and National Assembly polls and the governorship and State Houses of Assembly elections began on 28 September and 12 October, respectively. Meanwhile, the Independent National Electoral Commission has been, inter alia, monitoring political parties to avoid a breach of the first National Peace Accord prepared by the National Peace Committee and signed by party leaders on 29 September to guide the electoral campaigns.

19. In Senegal, following earlier disagreements about the eligibility of some opposition candidates, parliamentary elections were held on 31 July. The ruling Benno Bokk Yakaar coalition won 82 out of the 165 seats of the National Assembly, down from the 125 seats it had gained previously. The opposition coalitions, Yewwi Askan Wi led by Ousmane Sonko and Wallu Senegal led by former President Abdoulaye Wade, obtained 56 and 24 seats, respectively. On 18 September, Amadou Ba was appointed Prime Minister of a reshuffled Government comprising 25 per cent women.

20. On 28 July, the Parliament in Sierra Leone approved an amended electoral code, with the support of the opposition. However, preparations for the general elections to be held in June 2023 are taking place in a climate of political tensions. Compounded by the dissatisfaction about the rising cost of living and allegations of the instrumentalization of the judiciary targeting opposition leaders, violent clashes between protesters and security forces broke out on 10 August in Freetown, Makeni, and other towns, especially in the northwest, resulting in at least 25 casualties, including four police officers. On 13 August, the opposition Mayor of Freetown, Yvonne Aki-Sawyerr, was arrested for obstructing the police, and later released on bail. The political environment remained tense and polarized following a request from the Government to the Electoral Commission, on 20 October, to conduct the general elections in 2023 using the proportional representation system, rather than the constituency-based first past the post-system that had been in place.

21. In Togo, ahead of regional elections in 2023 and faced with new terrorism threats in the northern region, the Prime Minister, Victoire Tomegah Dogbé, met with political parties on 4 August to discuss the efforts by the Government to counter insecurity. The meeting forged cross-party consensus around measures to be taken by the Government in this respect.

B. Security situation

22. The security situation in the subregion continued to deteriorate in central Sahel, notably in Burkina Faso and Mali. Al-Qaida-affiliated Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin engaged in frequent confrontations with Islamic State in the Greater Sahara over access to resources and influence, with civilian populations caught in the crossfire. Terrorist attacks in Benin and Togo highlighted the persistent threat of a spillover of insecurity to coastal countries. Meanwhile, Nigeria continued to experience a multi-dimensional security crisis.

23. Armed groups in Burkina Faso continued encircling cities and targeting infrastructure. In the major provincial cities of Djibo and Dori, in the Sahel region, Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin and Islamic State in the Greater Sahara inflicted multiple civilian and military casualties. On 15 July, armed groups destroyed two essential bridges in the Sahel region. On 26 September, in Gaskindé, Soum province, an attack on a supply convoy of about 150 trucks heading to the city of Djibo resulted in a dozen casualties. As part of their response, the authorities stepped up the recruitment of up to 50,000 civilian defence volunteers.

24. In Mali, following the departure of international forces, armed groups have advanced in the east, gaining control of large areas bordering the Niger. On 6 September, Islamic State in the Greater Sahara fought against rival violent extremist groups, as well as the Tuareg-affiliated Mouvement pour le salut de l'Azawad, and took over the city of Talataye, Ansongo *cercle*, Gao region.

25. In the Niger, civilians suffered attacks primarily from Boko Haram-affiliated groups and splinter groups. On 29 August, suspected Boko Haram fighters killed 20 fishermen in Kablewa on Lake Chad. On 16 October, two women were killed by an improvised explosive device in Diffa, in the southeast of the country near the border with Nigeria, where Boko Haram-affiliated and splinter groups continued to conduct criminal activities, including kidnapping for ransom. However, the security environment showed signs of stabilization owing to, inter alia, the improvement of security responses and the dismantling of terrorist bases by the military of the Niger, with the support of redeployed international forces.

26. In north-eastern Benin, on 13 and 14 September, two civilians were killed in an assault on a customs post in Malanville, in Alibori Department. In northern Togo, civilians were directly targeted for the first time, when four coordinated attacks on 14 and 15 July killed at least a dozen people. A state of emergency, which had initially been declared in June for a period of three months, was extended for an additional six months in September.

27. In Nigeria, several security incidents caused about 2,000 casualties from July to September, including 550 civilians. Armed militias that were mostly concentrated in the north-western States of Zamfara and Sokoto, have been expanding their operations to the central and southern States of Plateau, Benue and Delta. In the north-east, civilians were caught in recurrent fighting between Boko Haram and Islamic State West Africa Province, which appeared to gain ground in several localities in Borno State. For example, on 15 September, a clash between the two groups in Gaizuwa, Bama local government area, Borno State, led to dozens of fatalities. Moreover, both groups conducted attacks in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. On 5 July, Islamic State West Africa Province claimed responsibility for an assault on Kuje prison, setting free 64 suspected terrorists. On 25 July, an attack along the Kaduna-Abuja highway triggered school closures, after eight soldiers had lost their lives in an assault targeted at the Army Presidential Guards Brigade in Bwari local government area on 22 July. In a related development, Islamic State West Africa Province reportedly also stepped up its activities in the southern States of Kogi, Edo

and Ondo, often targeting police premises, vehicles and places of worship, and causing numerous fatalities. On 12 August, the authorities reported the arrest of suspects linked to the Islamic State West Africa Province in connection with the killing of 40 people in the attack against a church in Owo, Ondo State, on 5 June.

28. Meanwhile, authorities in Nigeria further intensified counter-insurgency operations in the north-east, notably around Lake Chad. On 12 August, the President of Nigeria, Muhammadu Buhari, launched a revised version of the National Counterterrorism Strategy of 2016 as part of a new national crisis management doctrine, which, *inter alia*, calls for greater collaboration between government institutions under the coordination of the Office of National Security.

29. Countries affected by terrorism in the subregion have enhanced their security cooperation. The Niger signed military cooperation agreements with Benin and Burkina Faso on 11 July and 22 August, respectively. The member States of the Accra Initiative maintained their ongoing operations and initiated confidence-building initiatives in some hotspot areas. On 22 November, they gathered in Ghana and called for the operationalization, within a month, of a Multinational Joint Task Force of the Accra Initiative, comprised of 10,000 soldiers.

30. As observed in the most recent report of the Secretary-General on piracy and armed robbery at sea in the Gulf of Guinea and its underlying causes ([S/2022/818](#)), maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea continued to improve. In the West African maritime domain, no kidnappings were reported in the third quarter of 2022. Incidents of piracy and armed robbery at sea also declined from eight to two. This improvement is attributable to the deterrent effect of convictions for piracy in Nigeria and Togo in 2021 and increased naval patrols by both regional and international navies. There is currently no empirical evidence of any operational and organizational links between violent extremist, terrorist and pirate groups in the subregion.

C. Socioeconomic context

31. According to the International Monetary Fund, overall economic growth in the subregion is declining, interrupting the socioeconomic recovery post-coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. Rising food and energy prices, including owing to the impact of the armed conflict in Ukraine, are particularly affecting vulnerable segments of society. In addition, costly mitigation measures implemented by, for example, the Governments of Burkina Faso, Senegal and Togo, have led to steadily rising debt burdens with the debt-to-gross domestic product ratio approaching or exceeding the 70 per cent threshold. In Ghana, where inflation rose from 13.9 per cent in January to 37.2 per cent in September, the Government concluded a \$3 billion loan with the International Monetary Fund in November. Mauritania and the Niger increased petrol prices, which led to protests.

32. Between June and December, six countries of the subregion finalized their United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks (Benin, Cabo Verde, Ghana, Niger, Nigeria and Togo).

D. Humanitarian context

33. The humanitarian situation remained dire across the region, as instability, violence, forced displacement and food insecurity exacerbated already high levels of vulnerability, notably in the Sahel. About 11,100 schools remained closed or non-operational owing to violence across the Sahel, up from 6,800 in the previous reporting period, with 40 million children out of school. Women and girls also faced

high risks of abduction and sexual and gender-based violence. In the central Sahel, about 285 health centres were closed owing to insecurity, up by 40 per cent from the last reporting period; the majority of those that remained open were not fully functional.

34. About 6.3 million people are displaced across the Sahel, which is 300,000 higher than the previous reporting period. While the number of internally displaced persons remained stable in Nigeria, it rose in Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger. The deteriorating security situation in the southern and eastern parts of Burkina Faso, as well as the overall socioeconomic conditions in the Sahel, have triggered increasing waves of displacement to coastal countries, creating emergency needs and exacerbating underlying vulnerabilities. By the end of October, 943 Burkinabe refugees were recorded in Benin, and 4,958 in Togo. Since July, no new Burkinabe refugees were recorded in Côte d'Ivoire or Ghana, which have so far registered approximately 4,042 and 2,000 refugees, respectively. The overall number of recorded refugees increased by 2,200 in Mauritania, and 2,458 in Mali.

35. The food crisis in the Sahel was compounded by shortages of wheat and fertilizer as a result of the conflict in Ukraine, regional insecurity and the growing impact of climate change. Over 18.6 million people are experiencing severe food insecurity, which is 5.6 million more than in the last reporting period, with Burkina Faso, the Niger and Nigeria being the hardest hit. This includes 2.1 million people experiencing emergency levels of food insecurity.

36. During the reporting period, the region was severely impacted by extreme weather events, experiencing extreme droughts and floods. Nigeria experienced the worst flooding in a decade affecting more than 4.4 million people. Over 660 people lost their lives, and 1.3 million people were displaced across the country. Heavy rains and floods also destroyed large swathes of agricultural land in the Niger, affecting more than 327,000 people. In Ghana, the Gambia, Senegal and Sierra Leone the rains resulted in fatal flash floods, killing 103 people, displacing 27,300 others and damaging 13,800 houses.

37. Humanitarian access remained limited, depriving vulnerable populations of critical assistance, and exposing humanitarian personnel to increased risks. In Burkina Faso, Mali and Nigeria, security threats continued to hinder the delivery of humanitarian assistance. According to an assessment by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, over 24.4 million people in the Sahel needed assistance in 2022, about six million more than in 2021. As at 19 December, only about 46 per cent of funding of the requirements for the humanitarian response plans developed for Burkina Faso, Mali, the Niger and Nigeria, and requiring over \$3.17 billion, has been secured.

E. Human rights

38. The protection of civilians remained a major challenge in the fight against terrorists and other organized armed groups, resulting in increased advocacy by human rights actors for the respect of national and international human rights standards by security forces. In Burkina Faso, the Government launched investigations into allegations of extrajudicial executions by security forces in Toungouri, Centre-Nord region.

39. There was also progress in the fight against impunity. In Guinea, on 28 September, the historic domestic trial for crimes committed in Conakry during the 28 September 2009 incident commenced. Eleven individuals, including the former transition president, Captain Moussa Dadis Camara, appeared before the Court in Dixinn charged with offences including murder, rape and torture. The trial constitutes

an important milestone for victims' groups in their quest for justice. In Nigeria, on 27 September, in Abuja, the panel investigating the violations by the Special Anti-Robbery Squad presented its report which, inter alia, identified 72 police officers accused of extrajudicial killings and recommended 28 officers for prosecution.

40. There was progress on transitional justice in the Gambia, with the suspension of the State employees listed in the report of the Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission, which represented a noticeable first step in the implementation of the white paper issued by the Government on 25 May. Consultations over the creation of a hybrid court to prosecute crimes committed during the tenure of former President Yahya Jammeh were held with ECOWAS. In addition, discussions continued on the creation of both an independent reparations commission and a special prosecution unit, as recommended in the white paper. On 18 October, the Attorney General and Minister of Justice of the Gambia briefed the Peacebuilding Commission on the transitional justice process. The Commission welcomed the plan by the Government to organize a stakeholder conference to present its white paper implementation plan and identify areas that partners could support.

41. On 4 November, Liberian Kunti Kamara, was sentenced to life imprisonment for complicity in crimes against humanity and acts of barbarism and torture by a French Court through the exercise of universal jurisdiction. Kunti Kamara is the second Liberian to be convicted for his role in the country's two civil wars, following the conviction of Alieu Kosah in 2021 in Switzerland.

42. Meanwhile, human rights actors in many countries of the region continued to decry the shrinking civic and political space, especially following the shooting of protesters during demonstrations, such as in Guinea and Sierra Leone. Human rights defenders have further denounced the arrest, detention and intimidation of activists, journalists or political opponents in Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Senegal and Sierra Leone.

F. Gender

43. During the reporting period, there was no significant progress on women's representation in decision-making bodies. Yet, women make up 43 per cent of the new National Assembly of Senegal as a result of a strict application of the country's parity law, in line with the two previous legislatures. In Sierra Leone, Parliament approved legislation in December which provides for 30 per cent women's representation in Cabinet, Parliament and civil service positions, as well as in private institutions. With seven West African countries scheduled to hold elections in 2023, there have been strong calls by civil society for greater political representation and participation of women.

44. At the institutional level, on 18 and 19 October, ECOWAS and the African Union held an experts' workshop, which validated the simplified African Union Continental Results Framework on women and peace and security in West Africa. ECOWAS also held an inception workshop, on 5 and 6 October, on the establishment of an ECOWAS women and peace and security steering group to support implementation, monitoring and resource mobilization for its women and peace and security engagements. Moreover, ECOWAS adopted a 2022–2026 early warning and early response strategic plan, which included gender-specific elements, such as the generation of gendered and nuanced alerts and response options and the integration of the human security concerns of women and youth.

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

45. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General for West Africa and the Sahel engaged extensively with regional and international actors to mobilize support to address insecurity in the Sahel and counter the threat of terrorism spreading to coastal countries. He maintained continuous dialogue with regional leaders and other stakeholders to promote democratic governance and peaceful elections and support efforts towards the restoration of constitutional order in transition countries. In that regard, he participated in the sixty-first ordinary session of the ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State and Government, held on 3 July in Accra, and in the extraordinary session held on 22 September in New York, both of which addressed the situation in Burkina Faso, Guinea and Mali. The Deputy Special Representative, in her capacity as Officer-in-Charge of UNOWAS, attended the 62nd ordinary session of the ECOWAS Authority, which was held on 4 December in Abuja.

46. Regarding the transition in Burkina Faso, the Special Representative gave a briefing to the Peacebuilding Commission on 15 July on the importance of supporting regional efforts to ensure a transparent and inclusive transition. On 24 September, the Special Representative met with Mr. Damiba and emphasized the importance of setting up a transition monitoring committee with international partners. Following the coup d'état of 30 September, a joint ECOWAS-UNOWAS high-level mission held discussions with the new leadership and local actors on 4 October. The high-level mission called upon the military authorities to respect the commitments made by Burkina Faso in its consultations with ECOWAS and the international community. On 14 October, the transition timetable that had previously been agreed upon with ECOWAS, with the expected end of the transition set for 1 July 2024, was confirmed by a national conference.

47. With regard to Guinea, the Special Representative consulted with political stakeholders and external partners to facilitate constructive dialogue between the transitional authorities and ECOWAS on the timelines for a return to constitutional order. Ahead of the sixty-first ordinary session of the ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State and Government, the Special Representative met with the then Prime Minister, Mohamed Béavogui, and called upon political actors to pursue an inclusive political transition in accordance with ECOWAS decisions. On 21 September, he further underscored his call for a constructive dialogue in meetings with the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Morrissanda Kouyaté. UNOWAS also provided support to the ECOWAS-appointed mediator for Guinea, the former President of Benin, Thomas Boni Yayi, including by facilitating his deployment to Bissau on 13 October for discussions with the Chairperson of the ECOWAS Authority on the situation in Guinea. The consultation culminated in the deployment of a technical mission by ECOWAS to Guinea from 16 to 21 October, which reached a preliminary agreement with the Guinean authorities on a 24-month transition. The preliminary agreement was later endorsed by the ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State and Government at its 62nd ordinary session.

48. Ahead of legislative elections in Senegal on 31 July, the Special Representative held several consultations with political stakeholders and encouraged them to foster a conducive electoral environment.

49. In anticipation of the general elections in Nigeria scheduled for February and March 2023, the Special Representative held similar consultations, from

27 September to 5 October, with presidential candidates of several political parties, including the main opposition People's Democratic Party, and with the Chair of the National Peace Committee. On 29 September, the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for West Africa and the Sahel attended the signing of a peace pledge by all presidential candidates in which they expressed their commitment to peaceful electoral campaigns. In addition, on 1 December, UNOWAS supported the Kaduna State Peace Commission in holding a stakeholders' forum in Kaduna, in collaboration with the National Peace Committee and the United Nations country team. At the event, state authorities, Chairs of political parties and civil society organizations expressed their commitment to peaceful elections.

50. In Guinea-Bissau, the Special Representative was in frequent contact with the President and political actors to address unresolved challenges ahead of the legislative elections that had initially been slated for 18 December 2022 but were subsequently postponed to June 2023 for financial and technical reasons. In his meetings with the President on 23 September and 10 October, the Special Representative advocated for the promotion of an environment conducive to inclusive elections.

51. The Special Representative also pursued advocacy for social cohesion and political dialogue ahead of the general elections in Sierra Leone in June 2023. Following the protests of 10 August, he met twice with the Vice-President, Mohamed Juldeh Jalloh, on 4 and 10 September, expressing concern and reiterating his call for dialogue to facilitate an inclusive electoral process. As a result, a special consultative committee was set up to facilitate communication between the ruling Sierra Leone People's Party and the opposition All People's Congress on the upcoming elections.

52. During the reporting period, the Special Representative prioritized collaboration with the United Nations country teams in the subregion to maximize the collective impact of United Nations peacebuilding activities. Against this backdrop, from 9 to 12 August, he accompanied the Deputy Secretary-General on an official visit to Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Nigeria, Senegal and Togo. On the margins of the high-level week of the seventy-seventh session of the General Assembly, the Special Representative also participated in two high-level meetings to mobilize support for the Sahel.

B. Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission

53. Further progress was made in the implementation of the judgment of the International Court of Justice of 10 October 2002. On 25 and 26 August, the Special Representative chaired the thirty-fourth session of the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission, during which the parties settled one of the four remaining areas of disagreement. They also decided to refer the other three outstanding areas of disagreement back to the International Court of Justice for clarification on the interpretation of the Court's judgment regarding those areas.

54. Physical demarcation has also advanced, with the emplacement of 327 more pillars. The construction of the next lot of 215 pillars will be launched in 2023. After that process, 481 pillars will remain to be constructed for the physical demarcation to be completed.

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

55. UNOWAS maintained its collaboration with regional partners, including through its liaison cells to ECOWAS in Abuja and to the G5 Sahel in Nouakchott. In

that regard, the Special Representative participated in the sixty-first ordinary session of the ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State and Government, where he reaffirmed the support of the United Nations for the revision of the 2001 Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance. He also expressed a commitment to reinforcing the partnership between UNOWAS and the new seven-member ECOWAS Commission that was confirmed at that session, in line with the institutional reforms of ECOWAS.

56. The Special Representative also continued his high-level engagements with the G5 Sahel, against the backdrop of the withdrawal of Mali from all G5 Sahel structures as from 30 June, including its Joint Force. On 9 September, he met with the President of the Niger, Mohamed Bazoum, and commended the President's efforts to strengthen cooperation with neighbouring States, including through a revitalization of the G5 Sahel. Moreover, UNOWAS deployed a team to Niamey to support the work of the Independent High-Level Panel on Security and Development in the Sahel, led by the former President of the Niger, Mahamadou Issoufou, including participation in its first consultative meeting in Niamey, held from 17 to 22 October, at which it agreed on a road map, as well as to holding a series of regional consultations in Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Senegal which were conducted from 24 to 29 October.

1. Dynamics between farmers and herders

57. UNOWAS, in collaboration with the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa and the Office of the Special Coordinator for Development in the Sahel, implemented a cross-regional project on farmer-herder dynamics in West and Central Africa. The three United Nations entities convened a good practices workshop in Yaoundé on 29 and 30 September, which was attended by farmer and herder associations, women and youth representatives from both regions and ECOWAS. Participants shared good practices and formulated recommendations to resolve conflicts and promote local-level initiatives. They also carried out a visit, on 24 and 25 November, to Cotonou to explore the approach implemented in Benin to deal with farmer-herder dynamics.

2. Lake Chad basin

58. As part of his wider consultations on the situation in the Lake Chad basin, on 1 October, the Special Representative consulted with the Special Envoy of the President of Nigeria for the Lake Chad Basin, Babagana Kingibe, and encouraged him to ensure that Nigeria continued to play its leadership role in the Lake Chad basin.

3. Cross-border security strategy in the Mano River Union

59. During the reporting period, UNOWAS maintained close cooperation with the secretariat of the Mano River Union to coordinate efforts to promote the holding of peaceful general elections in 2023 in Liberia and Sierra Leone, capitalizing on dialogue and confidence-building activities supported by the Ahmad Tejan Kabbah Foundation and the Mano River Women's Peace Network in border communities.

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

60. UNOWAS participated in consultations on maritime insecurity that were organized by the Group of Seven Group of Friends of the Gulf of Guinea on 5 and 6 July in Berlin and on 1 and 2 December in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire. A key outcome of those consultative meetings was the decision to convene a high-level meeting between ECOWAS, the Economic Community of Central African States and the Gulf

of Guinea Commission to reflect on the future of the Yaoundé Architecture for maritime safety and security.

61. On 15 September, UNOWAS organized a workshop in Dakar on strengthening maritime-related jurisdictions that was attended by experts and representatives from regional institutions and United Nations entities. Participants took stock of challenges to the operationalization of the Yaoundé Architecture and advocated for the ratification and domestication of relevant instruments, notably the 2016 Charter on Maritime Security and Safety and Development in Africa and the 2005 Protocol to the Convention for the Suppression of Unlawful Acts against the Safety of Maritime Navigation, to further empower judicial authorities.

5. Terrorism and violent extremism

62. Following engagements between the Special Representative and the member States and secretariat of the Accra Initiative, on 13 and 14 September, UNOWAS supported an orientation workshop for Accra Initiative secretariat staff in Accra that discussed the Initiative's vision and operational issues. On 22 November, the Deputy Special Representative, in her capacity as Officer-in-Charge of UNOWAS, attended the summit of Heads of State of the Accra Initiative and reaffirmed the continued support of UNOWAS for the Initiative as an African-led, regional effort to strengthen security cooperation across West Africa and the Sahel.

63. UNOWAS participated in the fourth plenary meeting of the Capacity-building in the West Africa Region Working Group of the Global Counterterrorism Forum, which was held in Accra from 22 to 24 June. The meeting, which was organized by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, endorsed a revised set of thematic priorities on preventing terrorism and violent extremism that will constitute the strategic agenda of the Working Group for the next two years. In addition, from 6 to 13 October, UNOWAS participated in the hybrid second follow-up visit to Nigeria by the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, which assessed measures taken by Nigeria to implement certain aspects of Security Council resolutions [1373 \(2001\)](#), [1624 \(2005\)](#), [2178 \(2014\)](#), [2396 \(2017\)](#) and [2617 \(2021\)](#).

6. Adverse implications of climate change

64. UNOWAS organized several events to advance implementation of the Dakar Call to Action on Climate Change, Peace and Security in West Africa and the Sahel, which was adopted in April 2022. On 11 and 12 October, UNOWAS, in collaboration with ECOWAS and the African Union, held a capacity-building workshop on the theme "Empowering youth for climate action, peace and security in West Africa and the Sahel" in Abidjan. The workshop brought together youth advocates from across the region, along with representatives of regional organizations, civil society, development partners and the United Nations, to capture best practices and highlight youth-led initiatives for climate action and conflict prevention in the region, especially within the framework of implementing the Great Green Wall initiative.

65. On 20 October, UNOWAS organized a virtual conference on women's initiatives for climate action that brought together women and youth advocates, entrepreneurs, researchers, United Nations entities, intergovernmental agencies and civil society organizations, as well as financial institutions. Participants identified existing best practices on climate action to develop coherent approaches to empowering women through enhanced partnerships and gender-responsive solutions. Further to this, on 15 November, UNOWAS, in collaboration with ECOWAS and multiple United Nations partners, convened a side event on the theme "Empowerment of youth and women for climate action, peace and security in West Africa and the Sahel" on the margins of the twenty-seventh session of the Conference of the Parties to the United

Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt. The side event showcased innovative solutions led by youth and women in the subregion.

66. Furthermore, as the secretariat of the United Nations Regional Working Group on Climate Change, Security, Environment and Development in West Africa and the Sahel, UNOWAS held two sessions focused on building synergies around the Dakar Call to Action, in collaboration with ECOWAS and the climate security mechanism of the United Nations.

7. Security sector reform, drug trafficking and transnational organized crime

67. From 11 to 15 July, UNOWAS took part in a joint United Nations-African Union-ECOWAS technical assessment mission on security sector reform in the Gambia. In their interactions, national interlocutors expressed strong commitment to reinvigorating the security sector reform process, resulting in the reactivation of the country's steering committee on security sector reform, which had been dormant for three years.

68. UNOWAS, in collaboration with the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance, also conducted a series of workshops on promoting gender equality and women's empowerment within the defence and security services of the Gambia. The 68 representatives from various security agencies and the Standing Committee on Defence and Security of the National Assembly of the Gambia who attended the workshops recommended, inter alia, enhancing women's recruitment campaigns and performance-based management systems.

8. Joint civilian project to address intercommunal violence in the region

69. As part of its support to peace efforts in the Liptako-Gourma region, UNOWAS assisted the Timbuktu Institute and Dialogue sans frontières in formulating an initiative aimed at strengthening traditional dialogue platforms for conciliation and trust-building between communities in various border regions of Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger.

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

70. During the reporting period, the implementation of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel was marked by strengthened partnerships among United Nations entities at the country level and with subregional and regional institutions to reinforce the humanitarian-development-peace nexus. Further to the decisions of the thirteenth meeting of the steering committee, held in May, a policy study was launched on 1 July to identify the impact of geostrategic trends on peace and development in the Sahel. On 23 September, the Office of the Special Coordinator for Development in the Sahel and the Islamic Development Bank signed a memorandum of understanding for effective cooperation in areas of mutual interest.

71. Key priorities of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel were integrated into the new and updated common country analyses for the Gambia, Guinea, Mauritania and Senegal, as well as in the new generation United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks for the Niger and Nigeria. In addition, the United Nations continued to develop specific projects and initiatives to advance implementation of the strategy's key programmatic pillars. For instance, on 9 November, United Nations regional directors and UNOWAS approved the launch

of a revamped “peace and security offer” for the Sahel, strengthening the overall support to human security by reinforcing human rights and gender-focused activities, especially in border areas. Other priorities in the “peace and security offer” include security sector reform and support for the management of natural resources.

E. Promoting good governance, respect for the rule of law, human rights and gender mainstreaming

72. With regard to good governance, on 6 and 7 September in Dakar, UNOWAS, in partnership with the Open Society Initiative for West Africa, the Kofi Annan Foundation, the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs and UNDP, organized a colloquium on the enhancement of democracy and good governance in West Africa. As a key recommendation, participants called for the identification of resource persons, including former Heads of State, to advocate and reach consensus with concerned Governments on the revision of the 2001 ECOWAS Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, including on the issue of term limits.

73. On 17 and 18 October, UNOWAS provided technical and financial support for the organization of the consultative non-governmental organization forum in Banjul, prior to the seventy-third session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights. The forum adopted a number of thematic and country specific resolutions to be submitted to the ACHPR, including one condemning unconstitutional changes of government and military transitions and for steps to be taken to ensure the respect for human rights within these contexts.

74. On 20 October, UNOWAS commissioned a capacity-building needs assessment on the involvement of religious and traditional leaders in peacebuilding. Furthermore, from 24 to 26 October, UNOWAS, together with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, ECOWAS and the West African Human Rights Defenders’ Network, participated in a consultative meeting in Lomé on the impact of transitional justice processes on peace consolidation in the region. Participants committed to setting up a transitional justice and national reconciliation platform for religious and traditional leaders in the region.

75. Regarding gender mainstreaming, on 10 August, UNOWAS organized a joint United Nations-African Union-ECOWAS brainstorming session on threats and joint opportunities relating to the women and peace and security agenda in West Africa.

76. UNOWAS continued to support the Working Group on Women, Youth, Peace and Security in West Africa and the Sahel. At an event organized in collaboration with UN-Women from 19 to 23 September in Monrovia, 61 participants from the 15 ECOWAS member States, as well as Chad and Mauritania, reviewed the status of implementation of the Working Group’s activities at the national and regional levels and benefited from training on project formulation and resource mobilization.

77. With respect to youth, UNOWAS and the national chapters of the Working Group on Women, Youth, Peace and Security in West Africa and the Sahel organized capacity-building events for youth organizations across the subregion on Security Council resolution [2250 \(2015\)](#) and the fight against gender-based violence. UNOWAS also facilitated four experience-sharing sessions with youth peace clubs in Côte d’Ivoire, the Gambia, Ghana and Togo that had been established with United Nations support from 2019 to 2021. In addition, from 1 to 4 December, UNOWAS supported the annual conference of the African Network of Young Leaders for Peace and Sustainable Development, which was held in Lomé. The conference recommended, inter alia, to diversify the Network’s partnerships, develop a new strategic plan and boost resource mobilization.

IV. Observations and recommendations

78. I remain concerned about the political, security, economic and social impact of unconstitutional changes of government on the stability of the subregion. I welcome efforts by the ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State and Government towards a timely restoration of constitutional rule and take note of the agreements reached between ECOWAS and respective transitional authorities towards this end. The United Nations reiterates its commitment and readiness to accompany regional efforts towards strengthening democratic governance, peace, security and sustainable development in the subregion.

79. The continued insecurity in the central Sahel and threats of a spread to coastal countries is deeply concerning. I welcome efforts under the Accra Initiative and call upon the countries involved to further intensify their cooperation to halt the expansion of violent extremism and terrorism to West African coastal States. I also urge partners to honour their commitments and increase their contributions to the Liptako-Gourma Stabilization Facility, the ECOWAS plan of action to combat terrorism for the period 2020–2024, and the implementation of the Regional Stabilization, Recovery and Resilience Strategy for Areas Affected by Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Basin Region. The United Nations will continue to support these efforts, including those aimed at tackling the root causes of violent extremism and terrorism, through the implementation of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel and the United Nations Support Plan for the Sahel. UNOWAS will further bolster its cooperation with the various subregional entities and initiatives to address cross-border security challenges, strengthen national and regional coordination, and promote the participation of women, youth and civil society in early warning, peacebuilding and sustaining peace.

80. The deteriorating security situation in the Sahel, which continues to put populations at risk, drive displacement and deprive children of education, continues to pose a threat to international peace and security. Mitigating this trend requires enhanced partnerships and a collective response, as well as political will, backed by predictable and adequate resources. I wish to reiterate that no decisive result can be obtained without effective coordination and harmonization of various initiatives of the international community. To that end, I look forward to the recommendations of the Independent High-Level Panel on Security and Development in the Sahel headed by Mr. Issoufou.

81. Reports of human rights violations against civilian populations in the conduct of counter-terrorism operations remain of serious concern. Impartial and transparent investigations are required to restore trust and bring perpetrators to justice. I strongly urge security forces in the region to adhere to international human rights and humanitarian law during counter-terrorism operations.

82. I reiterate my call upon all parties to respect humanitarian principles and to facilitate the delivery of emergency assistance to populations in need.

83. I welcome the holding of peaceful legislative elections in Senegal. I encourage political actors in Benin, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia and Sierra Leone to pursue inclusive consultations, strengthen social cohesion and build consensus on pending issues of disagreement ahead of the 2023 electoral cycle. Likewise, I urge stakeholders in Nigeria to fully abide by their commitment to conducting peaceful campaigns towards inclusive and transparent general elections in 2023.

84. I note the continued underrepresentation of women across the region in political processes and decision-making. I reiterate the importance of promoting the full and meaningful participation and representation of women in all political processes. I call

upon all stakeholders, in particular Governments and political parties, to ensure the effective implementation of existing instruments on women's empowerment and gender equality.

85. Opposition parties and civil society organizations in the subregion have expressed concerns over growing restrictions on civil liberties, including bans on peaceful demonstrations, and the detention of political opponents in some contexts. I urge national authorities to fully promote and protect human rights and the rule of law, which are essential in both functioning democracies and transition processes.

86. I welcome the continuous progress made by the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission, which is moving towards a resolution of the few remaining areas of disagreement. I encourage all concerned parties to persevere in good faith in their efforts, enabling the completion of the Commission's mandate.

87. Just as the economies of West Africa and the Sahel had resumed a trajectory of growth after the contraction and the exacerbation of inequalities spurred by the COVID-19 pandemic, the global context has once again dampened the economic outlook of the region. In that respect, I urge international partners to remain focused on providing assistance to West Africa and the Sahel.

88. I take due note of the institutional reforms of ECOWAS, including its appointment of a new seven-member Commission, which assumed office on 11 July. Considering the significant challenges facing the subregion, the United Nations remains committed to enhancing its partnership with ECOWAS and other subregional entities in advancing the consolidation of peace and democratic governance in West Africa and the Sahel. I therefore recommend that the mandate of UNOWAS be extended for another three years, from 1 February 2023 to 31 January 2026.

89. I wish to express my appreciation to the Governments of the ECOWAS region, the African Union, the ECOWAS Commission, the Group of Five for the Sahel, the Mano River Union, the Gulf of Guinea Commission and the Lake Chad Basin Commission for their continued cooperation with UNOWAS. I would also like to express my gratitude to my former Special Representative for West Africa and the Sahel, Annadif Khatir Mahamat Saleh, for his dedicated service, as well as to the staff of UNOWAS and the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission for their unrelenting efforts to advance peace and security in West Africa and the Sahel.
