

**Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale**

<b>Bilagsnr.:</b>	<b>848</b>
Land:	Nigeria
Kilde:	United Nations, Secretary-General (UN SG)
Titel:	Activities of the United Nations Office for West Africa ans the Sahel
Udgivet:	28. november 2025
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	24. februar 2026



# Security Council

Distr.: General  
28 November 2025

Original: English

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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 August to 28 November 2025. It contains an overview of developments and trends in West Africa and the Sahel and the activities of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS), as well as progress in the implementation of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel and an update on the situation in the Lake Chad basin, pursuant to Security Council resolution [2349 \(2017\)](#).

#### II. Developments and trends in West Africa and the Sahel

2. During the reporting period, several countries in West Africa and the Sahel held elections, advanced preparations for upcoming polls, engaged in political dialogues or pursued institutional reform. Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea-Bissau held elections on 25 October and 23 November, respectively, while the transitional authorities in Guinea announced presidential elections to be held on 28 December, following the constitutional referendum in September 2025. Preparations for elections in 2026 continued in Benin and the Gambia. Liberia and Senegal advanced anti-corruption and transparency reforms, while Mauritania and Senegal sustained inclusive political dialogues. Progress was also made on the youth, peace and security agenda as Liberia adopted its first national action plan and there were development advances in Benin, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Guinea, Mali and Senegal. Youth engagement in local peacebuilding initiatives increased, in particular in Mali and the Niger.

3. The security situation remained fragile. Terrorist and armed group activity persisted in the Lake Chad basin, central Sahel and border areas with coastal States, in particular Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Togo, disrupting essential services, economic activities and humanitarian access. An estimated 6.9 million people across the central Sahel required urgent assistance, amid ongoing violence and limited humanitarian funding, with only 23 per cent of the United Nations \$3.1 billion appeal having been met. Climate-related disasters, including flooding in Cabo Verde, Guinea and Nigeria further displaced populations, damaged infrastructure and disrupted livelihoods. Civic and media freedoms remained restricted in several countries, with continued reports of human rights violations.



4. Despite steady macroeconomic growth, widespread poverty and rising cost of living strained vulnerable populations. High debt-servicing reduced fiscal space for social protection, health and education, deepening socioeconomic fragility and inequality across the region.

5. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Confederation of Sahel States intensified their commitment towards regional security cooperation. ECOWAS continued diplomatic engagement to rebuild confidence with the Confederation, including outreach by the Chair of the ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State and Government to promote regional solidarity, peace and stability through enhanced security and economic cooperation. ECOWAS also advanced consultations on the future of regional integration in preparation for its special summit, aimed at adapting its institutional structures to an evolving regional and geopolitical context. Meanwhile, the Confederation continued to advance preparations for its joint security initiatives.

## **A. Politics and governance**

6. Political developments were shaped by electoral processes, ongoing transitions, institutional reforms and efforts to strengthen governance. Despite progress, tensions persisted around candidate eligibility and civic space restrictions, testing democratic resilience across several contexts.

7. Côte d'Ivoire held a presidential election on 25 October, amid heightened tensions after the Constitutional Council validated only 5 out of 60 aspiring candidates, including two women, on 8 September. The exclusion of key opposition figures, including the former President, Laurent Gbagbo, and Tidjane Thiam and Pascal Affi N'Guessan, raised concerns over electoral inclusivity and sparked protests which, according to the National Security Council, led to 11 fatalities, 71 persons injured and 1,658 arrests. On 4 November, the Constitutional Council confirmed the 27 October provisional results, declaring Alassane Ouattara the winner with 89.77 per cent and a voter turnout of 50.1 per cent. The opposition and some civil society organizations denounced the election as unfair. Meanwhile, preparations have started for the legislative elections scheduled to be held on 27 December.

8. In Guinea, a constitutional referendum was held on 21 September. On 26 September, the Constitutional Court announced that the vote had an approval rate of 89 per cent with a voter turnout of 86 per cent, though opposition parties rejected the results, citing restrictions on political and media freedoms. On 27 September, the Transition President, Mamadi Doumbouya, decreed the presidential election for 28 December 2025. The same day, the transitional legislative body, the Conseil national de transition, adopted a new electoral code establishing three new institutions for election management and oversight. While the Conseil has stated the code aims to enhance representativity, critics claimed it will increase executive control over the electoral process. On 12 November, the Supreme Court validated 9 out of 51 candidates for the presidential election, including the Transition President, confirming the provisional list announced on 8 November.

9. In Guinea-Bissau, preparations for the 23 November presidential and legislative elections proceeded peacefully. The polls mark the first presidential election since the closure of the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNIOGBIS) in 2020, and the first general elections fully financed from the national budget, amounting to approximately \$7.5 million. On 7 August, the President, Umaro Sissoco Embaló, dismissed the Prime Minister, Rui Duarte Barros, and appointed Braima Camará in his stead. On 17 October, the Supreme Court of Justice validated 12 presidential candidates, including the incumbent President and the former

President, José Mario Vaz. However, the exclusion, on procedural grounds, of the main opposition coalition, Plataforma da Aliança Inclusiva, and its presidential candidate, Domingos Simões Pereira, raised concerns over the inclusivity and credibility of the process.

10. Preparations for the elections in Benin and the Gambia to be held in 2026, shaped political developments in both countries. In Benin, opposition parties and some civil society organizations continued to question the inclusivity and representativity of the electoral process. On 27 October, the Constitutional Court validated only two presidential tickets for the 12 April 2026 election, invalidating the candidacy of the main opposition party, Les Démocrates, for failing to secure the 28 required sponsorship endorsements. For the municipal elections of 11 January 2026, the Commission électorale nationale autonome approved, on 17 November, the ruling coalition and Forces Cauris pour un Bénin émergent party lists but rejected Les Démocrates list because of incomplete files, following a disqualifying ruling by the Supreme Court on 14 November. In the Gambia, on 10 September, the opposition United Democratic Party selected its leader, Ousainou Darboe, as its flagbearer, prompting resignations by younger party aspirants. On 29 September, Parliament adopted a revised electoral code excluding diaspora voting, despite a Supreme Court ruling upholding that right.

11. Members of the Confederation of Sahel States focused on national institutional reforms. From 10 to 12 September, the Ministry of Territorial Administration, Decentralization and Mobility of Burkina Faso held consultations on strengthening decentralized services. On 28 October, the transitional legislative body in Burkina Faso unanimously adopted a draft law dissolving the Commission électorale nationale indépendante and assigning election management to the Ministry in charge of territorial administration. The Transitional Council adopted a National Charter for Peace and National Reconciliation, following the April 2024 intra-Malian dialogue and the denunciation of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali. In the Niger, on 15 October, the Transitional President, General Abdourahamane Tiani, reorganized judicial institutions and appointed officials within the High State Court, regional courts of appeal and specialized judicial units. Meanwhile, political activity remained suspended in Mali, Burkina Faso and the Niger.

12. Collectively, the Confederation advanced the operationalization of joint structures. On 19 September, the Presidents of the transitional legislative and advisory bodies of Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger submitted proposals to establish joint institutional meetings. On 22 September, the Confederation announced its collective withdrawal from the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, citing commitment to endogenous justice mechanisms and criticizing the Court as “a global example of selective justice”.

13. Bilateral tensions persisted between Algeria and Mali. On 16 September, Mali filed a complaint before the International Court of Justice against Algeria, alleging aggression and violations of international law. On 19 September, Algeria rejected the Court’s jurisdiction, resulting in the closure of the case in accordance with procedural rules. The transitional authorities in Mali acknowledged the position of Algeria rejecting the jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice in a communiqué dated 25 September. Renewed tensions between Guinea and Sierra Leone over the Yenga border area prompted ECOWAS to deploy a fact-finding mission to Sierra Leone from 26 to 29 August leading to consultations that called for demilitarization, cross-border cooperation and regional mediation.

14. Efforts to re-establish dialogue with the Confederation continued. On 22 September, the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, Mahmoud Ali Youssouf, met with the transitional foreign ministers of Burkina Faso, Mali and the

Niger on the margins of the United Nations General Assembly, urging cooperation with regional institutions, and cautioning against isolation. The Peace and Security Council of the African Union decided, in its meeting held at the ministerial level on 30 September, to establish a Task Force to support the countries of the Sahel in fighting against terrorism. From 4 to 6 November, the African Union Commission, in collaboration with the Office of the Special Envoy of the President of Ghana to the Confederation, organized a technical coordination meeting in Accra on the establishment of an inclusive platform for cohesive efforts between the African Union and Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mali and the Niger.

15. Between 8 August and 9 November, the Chairperson of the ECOWAS Authority, President of Sierra Leone, Julius Maada Bio, visited Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Nigeria, Senegal, the Gambia and Togo to advocate for solidarity and reaffirm the commitment of ECOWAS to inclusive dialogue with the Confederation. During his visit to Burkina Faso on 16 September, the first by an ECOWAS Head of State since the country withdrew from the subregional organization, the Chairperson of the ECOWAS Authority advocated for constructive engagement to rebuild confidence and promote regional security cooperation, including on counter-terrorism. On 6 October, the third session of the Statutory Council of Ministers of the West African Economic and Monetary Union, held in Dakar, designated the transitional Minister of Economy and Finance of Burkina Faso as President of the Council for a two-year mandate. In addition, on 18 November, Sierra Leone, in its capacity as President of the Security Council, organized a meeting on "Enhancing Regional Counter-Terrorism Cooperation in West Africa and the Sahel", chaired by President Julius Maada Bio.

16. Several countries advanced constitutional and institutional reforms. In Nigeria, following nationwide consultations held in July, the National Assembly Constitutional Review Committee held a public hearing on 22 September on key proposals addressing local government autonomy, State policing, electoral reform and gender and disability inclusion. In Togo, the formation of a 27-member Government on 8 October completed the transition to a parliamentary system under the Fifth Republic.

17. Governance and anti-corruption efforts have gained momentum in some countries. In Liberia, the President, Joseph Boakai, pledged to strengthen anti-money-laundering and counter-terrorism financing measures during a visit by the Director General of the Inter-Governmental Action Group against Money Laundering in West Africa, from 11 to 13 August. In Senegal, on 25 August, the Parliament adopted new legislation to restructure the National Anti-Corruption Office, enhance asset declarations and protect whistle-blowers. Between July and September in the Gambia, youth-led demonstrations over economic grievances and alleged corruption in the sale of assets of the former President, Yahya Jammeh, highlighted persistent public demand for accountability. Amid reports of heavy-handed policing, the President, Adama Barrow, reaffirmed citizens' right to peaceful protest, while urging restraint. Investigations, initiated by a parliamentary special committee and the National Audit Office in May over the corruption allegations into the Government's sale and disposal of assets of former President Jammeh, remain ongoing.

18. Efforts to promote political dialogue and national cohesion continued in several countries. In Sierra Leone, the Government and the main opposition party All People's Congress continued implementing recommendations from the Cross-Party Committee on electoral systems and management bodies review. In Mauritania, on 13 October, the President, Mohamed Cheikh El Ghazouani, received the report on the preparations for the national dialogue from Dialogue Coordinator Moussa Fall, marking the conclusion of the first phase of the dialogue. On 18 September, a Government reshuffle increased representation of women and marginalized communities in key posts.

## B. Security situation

19. During the reporting period, the security situation across the region deteriorated further, marked by persistent terrorist activity, intercommunal violence and transnational crime. Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin (JNIM), Islamic State Sahel Province (ISSP), Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) and Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati Wal-Jihad (also known as Boko Haram) expanded their presence and intensified attacks across the central Sahel and neighbouring coastal States. Governments intensified military responses to restore State authority, while regional partners increased efforts to step up coordination to counter transnational threats.

20. In Burkina Faso, terrorist groups increasingly used drones to conduct attacks in the northern and eastern regions. On 12 August, unidentified armed elements dropped improvised explosive devices from an uncrewed aerial vehicle targeting a World Food Programme-chartered helicopter in Solle, Nord Region, injuring four people. On 17 August, six explosive devices were dropped from uncrewed aerial vehicles targeting an army detachment in the same location. On 18 September, JNIM attacked three military installations in Djibo, Soum Province, killing eight soldiers from Burkina Faso. On 20 September, the Forces armées nationales repelled a large-scale assault against a military base in Foutouri, Eastern Region, reportedly killing 100 assailants.

21. In Mali, JNIM and affiliated groups maintained operational momentum. On 19 August, JNIM attacked a Malian army base in Farabougou in the Ségou region, killing 10 soldiers and imposing a siege on the town. On 22 August, the Malian Armed Forces re-established control of Farabougou. The same day, the Council of Ministers reallocated \$135 million previously earmarked for elections towards counter-terrorism efforts. In addition, security forces launched major counter-terrorism operations in the western regions of Kayes, Nioro du Sahel and Ségou. They also provided escorts to fuel trucks and convoys along the key transport corridors between Abidjan, Bamako and Dakar, to counter the economic blockade by JNIM since 3 September. Despite these efforts, JNIM continued to attack military installations and fuel convoys on strategic roads linking Mali to Côte d'Ivoire, Mauritania and Senegal. Between 13 and 14 September, JNIM attacked approximately 60 fuel tankers along the Diédiéni-Kolokani and Kayes-Nioro du Sahel routes. On 17 October, JNIM destroyed dozens of fuel trucks in the Sikasso region and disrupted vital supply routes, leading to severe shortages of fuel, food and essential services. This adversely affected the economy and the population and prompted the Government to close schools and universities from 27 October to 9 November.

22. In the Niger, the security situation remained tense, particularly in the Tillabéri region. On 4 August, the Government-supported "Garkuwar Kassa" initiative (Shields of the Homeland) was launched to mobilize civilian support against urban crime and strengthen community participation in public safety. On 10 August, however, 14 soldiers were reportedly killed in an ambush. On 12 August, more than 500 residents, mostly women and children, fled from Aderboukan (Tahoua region) to Affala (Tillabéri region) after armed groups threatened to impose a forced zakat. On 14 August, suspected terrorists attacked a passenger truck in Mehanna (Tillabéri region), killing 21 civilians. On 15 August, the Defence and Security Forces reportedly killed a key Boko Haram leader, Ibrahim Mahamadou, in Shilawa Island in the Diffa region. Subsequent attacks on 12 and 15 September in Tillabéri claimed at least 42 lives, including 20 soldiers.

23. Coastal countries bordering central Sahel faced rising spillover threats. On 1 August, Senegal deployed new operational units in Kédougou, Saraya and Tambacounda to reinforce security along its borders with Mali. In Benin, on 10 September, about 200 armed assailants, reportedly from neighbouring Nigeria,

attacked the village of Kalalé in Borgou Department, ambushed soldiers from a nearby base and targeted the local police station. According to local church authorities, no casualties were reported, although six residents were abducted and remain missing. On 5 October, another attack on a police station, in Ségbana near the Nigerian border resulted in the deaths of several officers from Benin.

24. Security incidents also increased in the tri-border areas between Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana. On 24 August, authorities in Burkina Faso arrested six Côte d'Ivoire officials from the Directorate of Aid and Assistance to Refugees and Stateless Persons were arrested on charges of espionage in the Tougbo area of Téhini department. The following day, unidentified gunmen killed four civilians in Difita (Téhini). Also on 24 August, in Ghana, land disputes and ethnic clashes in Gbinyiri in the Sawla-Tuna-Kalba District, displaced approximately 14,000 people who fled to Bounkani Department on Côte d'Ivoire and to Burkina Faso. Of these, 12,500 people have since returned, with 1,500 remaining in Bounkani. On 14 September, tensions flared in Hameli, near the Burkina Faso border, following reports of the kidnapping of a Burkinabe political activist. Protesters attacked border posts and blamed elements of the Burkinabe Volunteers for the Defence of the Homeland for the abduction of a refugee from Burkina Faso in Ghana.

25. In Nigeria, terrorist activity persisted in the north-east and north-west, alongside recurring resource-based conflicts in other regions, which underscored the multifaceted nature of insecurity in the country. On 19 August, assailants attacked a mosque in Unguwan Mantau, Katsina State, killing 32 worshippers. On 5 September, terrorists raided the village of Darajamal in Borno State, killing 63 people, including 5 soldiers and 58 civilians. In the same period, armed men attacked Oke-Ode, Kwara State, killing 12 forest guards. The Nigerian armed forces conducted airstrikes in Borno and Yobe States on 23 August and 18 September, reportedly neutralizing 35 and 25 alleged terrorists, respectively. On 31 August, the Nigerian armed forces reported the release of 117 hostages and the arrest of 150 suspected militants during operations in the north-east and north-west. On 17 November, 25 girls were abducted at the Government Girls' Comprehensive Secondary School in Maga, Danko Wasagu Local Government Area of Kebbi State, bordering Alibori department in Benin. Several attacks took place in Borno State, including the abduction and killing of a Brigadier General on 17 November.

26. Farmer-herder clashes continued to fuel insecurity, particularly in Benue State, where recurring violence from 23 to 28 August left 14 people dead and 14 injured. On 8 October, the Benue State Emergency Management Agency reported that 17 out of the State's 23 local government areas faced herder attacks, which displaced or financially incapacitated large numbers of civilians, disrupted local economies and deepened the food security crisis in Nigeria. In response, in October, the Federal Ministry of Livestock Development introduced measures to modernize the livestock sector, reduce open grazing and mitigate conflicts with farming communities.

27. Transnational organized crime remained a major concern. Authorities across the region reported significant narcotics seizures, reflecting the role of West Africa as a key transit hub for illicit drug-trafficking networks. On 15 August, transitional authorities in Guinea arrested 28 suspects and seized 106 kg of cannabis. On 22 August, Ghanaian authorities destroyed 6,513 kg of cannabis, 1.5 kg of cocaine and nearly 6 million capsules of tramadol, ecstasy and other substances valued at close to \$1 million. On 22 September, as part of Operation Corymbe in the Gulf of Guinea, two French naval ships intercepted an unregistered fishing vessel off West Africa, seizing 9.6 tons of cocaine valued at approximately \$600 million. On 24 September, the authorities of Senegal reported the seizure of over 306 kg of cocaine in operations

conducted over five days, including near the Mali border and at Dakar international airport, with an estimated street value exceeding \$50 million.

28. Maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea continued to show signs of improvement, though weak coordination and information-sharing among regional naval forces and civilian actors constrained deterrence and response. One attempted act of piracy was reported during the period, on 28 August, when pirates unsuccessfully tried to board a Malta-flagged chemical tanker off the coast in Lomé.

29. In this context, regional and continental initiatives to promote and strengthen collective security cooperation took place. The Deputy Secretary-General participated in the inaugural African Chiefs of Defence Staff Summit convened in Abuja, from 25 to 27 August, stressing the need to tackle the root causes of conflict and insecurity and calling for united, proactive responses. The summit sought to enhance military cooperation, including on counter-terrorism and integrated solutions to structural vulnerabilities, with an emphasis on education and human capital investment. On 29 August, ECOWAS Finance and Defence Ministers explored funding options for activating a regional counter-terrorism force, following a technical experts meeting on 27 and 28 August also in Abuja. On 3 and 4 September, the Nigerian National Counter-terrorism Centre and ECOWAS Commission convened a regional conference to foster coordinated responses to rising terrorism and violent extremism in the region. On 30 September, a ministerial-level meeting of the African Union Peace and Security Council addressed the escalating security and humanitarian crisis in the Sahel, calling for inclusive transitions and stronger cooperation on counter-terrorism, governance reform and community resilience.

### **C. Socioeconomic context**

30. During the reporting period, West Africa and the Sahel demonstrated overall economic resilience, despite inflation, limited fiscal space and the effects of insecurity and climate shocks. However, high debt-servicing and volatile commodity prices continued to constrain public spending and expose vulnerable populations to socioeconomic hardship.

31. According to the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations, the gross domestic product (GDP) growth for West Africa in 2024 was 3.6 per cent, and for 2025 and 2026 it is projected at 4.1 and 4.3 per cent, respectively. Growth is driven by mining, manufacturing and agriculture. The Niger, which recorded the region's highest growth rate at 10.3 per cent in 2024, is expected to moderate in 2025 as extractive investments stabilize. Côte d'Ivoire continues to lead West Africa Economic and Monetary Union markets, boosted by industrial diversification and investor confidence. Benin and Togo maintained steady performance underpinned by digital and fiscal reforms, though growth in Togo slightly slowed amid fiscal tightening and regional uncertainty.

32. Cabo Verde continued to promote sustainable tourism, the blue economy, digital services and climate resilience. The macroeconomic situation in Ghana stabilized, with inflation declining to 9.4 per cent as of September (the lowest since December 2021), and moderate growth projected. Nigeria began to register early impact of its 2023 economic reform measures, with GDP expected to grow by 3.2 per cent. Nonetheless, inflation remains high at 20.1 per cent and food prices continue to rise. The Government has increased investment in agriculture to reduce import dependence and bolster long-term food security. Guinea, despite optimism around the Simandou iron ore project, faced short-term financial pressures, including a liquidity crisis that triggered public frustration.

33. In the central Sahel, countries report progress on fiscal consolidation and governance reforms. Agricultural investment has been prioritized to strengthen food systems, although insecurity and climate risk continue to pose significant challenges.

34. Region-wide fiscal and monetary indicators reflected both resilience and vulnerability. Inflation is projected to decline from an average of 24.2 per cent in 2024 to 19.2 per cent by the end of 2025, driven by tighter monetary policy, improved supply chains and stabilization efforts in major economies, such as Nigeria. Public debt levels are expected to decline slightly from 68.9 per cent of GDP in 2024 to 66.8 per cent in 2025, though they remain above the continental average. With debt-service costs estimated at 3.7 per cent of gross national income, fiscal space remains limited, constraining government spending on essential sectors, such as health, education and social protection.

35. Persistent socioeconomic pressures continued to impede progress towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in West Africa. While most countries in the subregion performed above the continental average Sustainable Development Goals score of 54 per cent, none has reached the global benchmark of 68.6 per cent. Declining aid flows, complex tariff regimes and weak domestic revenue mobilization threaten to reverse previous gains. Multidimensional poverty remains widespread, exacerbated by limited access to essential services and uneven economic opportunities. At the same time, elevated prices for staple goods continue to strain household budgets, particularly among low-income, internally displaced and conflict-affected populations.

#### **D. Humanitarian context**

36. Humanitarian conditions across West Africa and the Sahel remained dire, driven by persistent insecurity, displacement and climate shocks that continued to strain already limited coping capacities. In areas affected by insecurity, women, children and youth continued to experience grave violations and abuses of their rights, including sexual and gender-based violence, which remained widespread and exacerbated by displacement, economic hardship and weakened protection systems.

37. Flooding linked to heavy rains due to climate change and inadequate water management severely disrupted lives and livelihoods and damaged infrastructure. An estimated 896,800 people were affected across the region, with Nigeria (402,900) worst hit, followed by the Niger (305,300), Cabo Verde (95,000) and Guinea (60,100). Since the onset of the rainy season, at least 448 deaths, 1,215 injuries and over 140,500 displacements have been reported across the region. Floods damaged or destroyed 75,050 homes and disrupted 10 health facilities and 45 schools.

38. As of 3 September, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees reported 5.2 million internally displaced persons in Burkina Faso, Mali, the Niger and Nigeria, unchanged from the previous reporting period. These countries were also hosts for 781,700 refugees and asylum-seekers, up from approximately 755,000. Mauritania hosted 176,798, while Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Togo collectively hosted 177,146. Access to basic services remained critical, in particular for the most vulnerable.

39. Humanitarian access remained severely constrained, mainly in the Sahel, due to insecurity and movement restrictions on aid workers. These conditions hampered the delivery of assistance to affected populations. Funding shortfalls further weakened response capacity. As at 3 November, only 23 per cent of the United Nations humanitarian appeal amounting to \$3.1 billion required to assist 6.9 million people across Burkina Faso, Mali, the Niger and Nigeria had been received, leaving millions without adequate support.

## E. Human rights

40. Human rights conditions in several countries of the region remained of concern, marked by restrictions on civic space, challenges to judicial independence, and continuing violations of fundamental freedoms. Judicial and security measures targeting political and civil society actors triggered public debate about due process and freedom of expression.

41. In many countries in the region, particularly in electoral and transitional contexts, restrictions on civic and political space intensified. Notably, political figures faced political exclusion, and freedom of expression and judicial independence were significantly affected. In Mali, in August, the transitional authorities arrested several political figures and members of the defence and security forces, citing an alleged plot to destabilize the transition. Among those detained were former Prime Ministers Moussa Mara and Choguel Maïga, arrested for “undermining the credibility of the State and opposing legitimate authority” and “embezzlement, forgery and misuse of public funds”, respectively. On 7 October, two generals arrested in connection with the alleged plot were indefinitely removed from the army. On 27 October, Mr. Mara was sentenced to two years in prison, one year of which was suspended. Civil society actors have raised concerns over the shrinking space for political dissent and use of judicial processes to suppress opposition voices.

42. In Guinea, on 22 August, the transitional authorities suspended three opposition parties, citing non-compliance with statutory obligations and sanctioned several media outlets accused of bias in their coverage of the constitutional referendum. These measures, alongside reports of restrictions on political gatherings and arrests of opposition supporters, heightened tensions ahead of the referendum. On 29 August, the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights expressed concern over increasing violations, including reports of arbitrary detentions and enforced disappearances, urging authorities to uphold fundamental rights and due process.

43. Freedom of expression and judicial independence came under pressure in several countries. In the Niger, on 7 August, the transitional authorities dissolved three key judicial unions, including the Autonomous Union of Magistrates, the Union of Magistrates and the Union of Justice Agents, citing alleged misconduct and corruption. Legal professionals and civil society groups condemned this as undermining judicial independence. On 14 August, tensions escalated after the dismissal of two magistrates from the Autonomous Union by the President, Abdourahmane Tchiani, and prompted a nationwide “justice morte” (dead justice) strike on 15 August. On 6 September, a prominent journalist was arrested, triggering concerns over media freedom by national stakeholders.

44. In Burkina Faso, between 10 and 14 October, a lawyer and 10 senior magistrates of the Ouagadougou Court of Appeal were arrested by presumed members of the National Security Council, reportedly in retaliation for a legal decision and taken to an unknown location. However, a Government statement issued on 13 November accused them of covering up and dismissing a significant corruption case in 2021.

45. Between 13 and 14 October, three journalists were also detained for publishing an unauthorized transcript of the interview the President gave on 28 September. Earlier, on 7 October, the Minister for Security announced the arrest of eight staff of the international non-governmental organization Safety Organization, four foreign nationals and four Burkina Faso nationals, on charges of espionage and treason. They were released on 30 October. The Minister claimed the non-governmental organization had shared sensitive security information with foreign entities, which the organization has denied.

46. In Senegal, civil society groups and human rights defenders raised concerns about judicial proceedings targeting individuals for spreading false information and insulting the Head of State, viewing these actions as restrictions on freedom of expression. In Guinea-Bissau, on 15 August, the authorities shut down several foreign Portuguese-language radio stations for alleged bias and subsequently expelled their representatives from the country.

47. In Togo, allegations of excessive use of force and arbitrary arrests during youth-led protests in June prompted the Groupe d'Intervention Judiciaire SOS-Torture en Afrique to initiate legal proceedings on 8 August against Government and security officials. Civil society groups also condemned the subsequent ban on demonstrations by the June 6 Movement (M66). In the Gambia, between August and September, at least 19 protesters were arrested during peaceful protests demanding Government accountability. In a separate incident, on 26 September, the death of a young man allegedly in police custody triggered violent clashes between the police and young people.

## **F. Gender and youth**

48. Women and girls across West Africa and the Sahel continue to face child and forced marriage, sexual violence and high school dropout rates, particularly in Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mali and the Niger, where insecurity and resource scarcity heighten their vulnerability. In response, on 1 September, Transitional Legislative Assembly of Burkina Faso adopted a revised Persons and Family Code, raising the minimum marriage age to 18, establishing consent as a legal requirement for marriage and eliminating gender-based discrimination in inheritance rights.

49. Youth participation in peace and political processes continued to expand across the region. On 29 August, Liberia launched its national action plan on youth and peace and security, joining Nigeria and the Gambia to adopt youth and peace and security national action plans. Benin is finalizing its youth and peace and security national action plan, while Burkina Faso, Ghana, Guinea, Mali and Senegal have initiated their respective processes. Young people in Mali and the Niger played increasingly active roles in community dialogue, peacebuilding and early warning systems, often filling critical gaps in areas with limited State presence.

## **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**

50. Despite the liquidity crisis that led to the suspension of some activities, UNOWAS remained steadfast in implementing its mandate. The Special Representative continued to advance dialogue and regional cooperation through his good offices, engaging key stakeholders across West Africa and the Sahel to address persistent challenges related to security and governance. Throughout the reporting period, he reaffirmed the commitment of the United Nations to supporting regional mechanisms and nationally-led political processes.

51. In Côte d'Ivoire, the Special Representative sustained engagement with all key political stakeholders to advocate for peaceful and inclusive elections. He undertook two missions, from 17 to 26 September and from 23 to 29 October, during which he encouraged dialogue and confidence-building among political actors to strengthen trust in the electoral process and mitigate the risk of violence.

52. In support of democratic transitions and constitutional governance, the Special Representative participated in the Fourth Annual Retreat for Special Envoys and High Representatives, convened by International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance in Dakar, from 14 to 16 September. At the retreat, he underscored the importance of regional leadership, institutional resilience and political will in safeguarding democratic norms and managing complex transitions.

53. To strengthen regional cooperation on security, the Special Representative maintained active engagements in high-level consultations with regional and international partners. From 25 to 27 August, he participated in the African Chiefs of Defence Staff Summit in Abuja where he reiterated the pivotal role of Nigeria in regional security and called for enhanced solidarity between ECOWAS member States and those of the Confederation of Sahel States.

54. On 3 and 4 September, the Special Representative addressed the regional conference on combating emerging terrorist groups, co-hosted by the National Counter-terrorism Centre of Nigeria and the ECOWAS Commission in Abuja. He urged participants to move from rhetoric to unified action and emphasized the need for holistic approaches that integrate security, inclusive dialogue, youth and women engagement and sustainable development. On 8 October, during the Sahel Special Envoys meeting in Dakar, co-chaired by the European Union Special Representative, João Cravinho, and by the Special Representative from Denmark, Birgitte Markussen, the Special Representative emphasized the importance of robust international support, stronger partnerships and coordinated counter-terrorism efforts.

55. On 11 and 12 October, the Special Representative participated in the second Lomé Peace and Security Forum, emphasizing the need to strengthen collaboration between the African Union, ECOWAS and the Confederation of Sahel States to operationalize Security Council resolution [2719 \(2023\)](#). While in Lomé, the Special Representative met with the President of the Council of Ministers, Faure Essozimna Gnassingbé, to discuss regional security cooperation and held consultations with members of an opposition coalition. From 14 to 16 October, at the 2025 Challenges Annual Forum in Accra, held in support of the ongoing review of the Secretary-General on the future of all forms of United Nations peace operations, the Special Representative further advocated for resolution [2719 \(2023\)](#) as a framework for meaningful engagement to countering terrorism in the Sahel.

## **B. Enhancing regional and subregional partnerships to address cross-border and cross-cutting threats to peace and security in West Africa and the Sahel**

56. UNOWAS continued its technical collaboration with ECOWAS and the African Union to address challenges related to democracy, governance and political stability. In support of regional initiatives to strengthen the link between early warning and early response mechanisms, UNOWAS participated in an ECOWAS Early Warning Directorate event held in Abuja from 17 to 19 September, marking two decades of collaboration with civil society organizations. Participants underscored the importance of reinforcing the ECOWAS-civil society organizations partnership to enhance early warning capacities and safeguard human security across the region. From 24 to 26 September, UNOWAS also participated in ECOWAS Commission regional consultations in Accra and Bissau, held in preparation for the forthcoming ECOWAS special summit. Discussions in Accra focused on democracy, constitutional order and good governance, while those in Bissau centred on political stability, peace and security.

57. Recognizing the growing impact of information integrity on peace and social cohesion, UNOWAS intensified efforts to counter disinformation and hate speech. In collaboration with the Government of Cabo Verde, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and other partners, UNOWAS co-organized the Regional Conference on Information Integrity in West Africa and the Sahel, held in Praia from 3 to 5 September. The conference brought together ministers and representatives from the Gambia, Liberia, the Niger and Nigeria, as well as from ECOWAS Commission, media, civil society and regulatory bodies. It concluded with the adoption of the Praia Policy Framework, a road map to foster an ethical, transparent and reliable information ecosystem.

58. UNOWAS continued to advance the climate, peace and security agenda in collaboration with regional and international partners. On 24 and 25 August, UNOWAS participated in the third Council of Ministers meeting of the W-Arly-Pendjari Transboundary Protected Area, which was held in Ouagadougou and brought together representatives from Benin, Burkina Faso and the Niger, as well as international partners. The representatives of the three countries endorsed a proposal for an interministerial dialogue on climate, peace and security, under the leadership of Burkina Faso as the newly appointed President of the Council, with the inaugural dialogue scheduled for the first quarter of 2026. At the ECOWAS workshop in preparation for the thirtieth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, held from 23 to 25 September, in Dakar, UNOWAS highlighted the importance of integrating climate, peace and security considerations into national and regional policies. In partnership with the United Nations Environment Programme, UNOWAS also conducted a climate, peace and security assessment in Nigeria from 5 to 12 November, as part of the broader Gulf of Guinea study covering 18 countries. The key finding is that recurrent annual flooding, driven by shifts in rainfall patterns are the primary climate stressor affecting communities. These floods lead to significant losses of goods and livelihoods, creating a cycle of vulnerability that increases social tensions, including the expansion of criminal networks.

59. The Office continued to strengthen its strategic partnerships with civil society organizations and think tanks. On 15 October, the Office signed a memorandum of understanding with the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre in Accra to formalize cooperation on regional dialogues, joint analysis on maritime and climate security, regional security, transnational, organized crime and women, youth, peace and security.

60. To promote coordinated security sector governance, UNOWAS co-organized a high-level dialogue on security sector reform and governance with ECOWAS and the African Union, the United Nations Office to the African Union and the United Nations Development Programme, in Dakar on 12 and 13 November. Participants endorsed recommendations to reinforce strategic approaches and partnerships for security sector reform and governance implementation. The Office also contributed to the ECOWAS Peace and Security Governance Project workshop from 8 to 10 October, organized for the Defence and Security Committee of the Parliament in Senegal, where it presented its security sector reform strategic framework and shared field-based insights and best practices. From August onward, UNOWAS began internal presentations of the findings from its multi-stakeholder evaluation of a decade of United Nations support to security sector reform in Côte d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso, the Gambia and Guinea.

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

61. UNOWAS deepened collaboration with regional civil society organizations to promote inclusive governance and the meaningful participation of women and youth in decision-making. From 11 to 14 August, the office participated in the strategic planning workshop of the Network on Peace and Security for Women in the Economic Community of West African States Space (Réseau paix et sécurité pour les femmes de l'espace de la Communauté économique des États de l'Afrique de l'Ouest) in Dakar, which reviewed progress and defined new priorities for advancing women's leadership in peace and security. Guinea-Bissau was elected to serve as Chair of the network. From 26 to 28 August, UNOWAS co-hosted the annual youth forum in Dakar with the International Labour Organization, the International Organization for Migration and other partners under the theme "Employment and Education in Emergencies for Young Women and Men: Building a Peaceful and Secure West Africa and Sahel". The Forum convened 150 young leaders, women and men, in-person and nearly 500 virtual participants from 17 countries, culminating in the adoption of the Dakar Youth Compact, which calls for coordinated, multisectoral action by governments and regional institutions to expand access to education, decent employment, and leadership opportunities for youth.

62. On 29 August, the Deputy Special Representative participated in the launch of the national action plan on youth and peace and security of Liberia in Monrovia, commending the active involvement of Liberian youth in its development and the Government's commitment to strengthening youth participation in peacebuilding and conflict prevention. On 11 and 12 September, UNOWAS also participated in a national workshop to develop the youth and peace and security national action plan in Senegal. From 13 to 15 October, UNOWAS, in collaboration with United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and ECOWAS, convened a regional seminar in Abuja to build the capacity of the West African Network of Young Women Leaders. The seminar focused on women's political participation, leadership and digital advocacy and featured a mentorship dialogue with members of the ECOWAS Female Parliamentarians Association.

63. From 3 to 7 November, UNOWAS and UN-Women, in partnership with the ECOWAS Commission and supported by the ECOWAS Peace, Security and Governance project of the European Union and the United Nations country team in Cabo Verde, convened the annual meeting of the Working Group on Women, Youth, Peace and Security in West Africa and the Sahel, in Praia. The meeting brought together 70 participants from 16 countries to review progress on the women and peace and security agenda, validate national and regional assessments, adopt the strategic plan for 2026–2030 and finalize action plans for 2026. Discussions emphasized national ownership, sustainable financing and stronger coordination and concluded with capacity-building sessions on the Continental Results Framework and the youth and peace and security agenda.

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

64. The Office of the Special Coordinator for Development in the Sahel, in collaboration with other United Nations partners, advanced implementation of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel through high-level forums, strategic partnerships and resource mobilization efforts.

65. On 7 August, the Office of the Special Coordinator for Development in the Sahel released the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel Annual Progress Report, outlining 2024 achievements across its three strategic pillars: governance, resilience and peace and security. The report underscores the impact of integrated, multisectoral approaches and joint United Nations-Government actions in driving sustainable development and long-term transformation. On 27 August in Niamey, the transitional Government of the Niger and the United Nations system launched four joint flagship programmes for 2025–2029, focusing on socioeconomic governance, food sovereignty, education and youth employability. Flagship programmes are progressing in Burkina Faso and Mali.

66. On 2 September, the Office of the Special Coordinator for Development in the Sahel and the United Nations Development Coordination Office co-hosted a high-level session at the Africa Food System Forum in Diamniadio, Senegal. Ministers from Guinea, Mali, the Niger and Senegal, together with United Nations leaders and youth entrepreneurs, discussed advancing food systems as drivers of peace, resilience and inclusive growth. The session emphasized the need to shift from aid to investment and the strengthening of regional cooperation. Bilateral meetings held on the margins of the Forum with delegations from central Sahel reinforced commitments to accelerate flagship programme implementation, particularly in Mali and Burkina Faso.

67. The Office of the Special Coordinator for Development in the Sahel intensified resource mobilization efforts, submitting project proposals, totalling \$337 million, from across the African continent, to the African Development Bank and the Islamic Development Bank with a focus on climate-resilient agriculture, food systems and value chains; renewable energy access and climate-smart infrastructure; youth employment, innovation, and entrepreneurship ecosystems; education, digital development and social protection; governance, cross-border cooperation and stabilization. In addition, the Office secured new bilateral funding, totalling \$1.9 million from Italy and Spain for initiatives on water, climate and gender equality. At the multilateral level, the Office of the Special Coordinator coordinated submissions from United Nations entities across Africa to the African Development Bank's Transition Support Facility, mobilizing \$190 million since 2023, and submitted a \$1 million proposal to Türkiye to support trade and technology in the Sahel. On 30 and 31 October, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for West Africa and the Sahel and the Special Coordinator for Development in the Sahel attended the eighteenth meeting of the Steering Committee of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel, held in Conakry, whose major outcome was the transition of the supervision of the integrated strategy to the regional Coordination Office for Africa and designation of champions to enhance the implementation of flagship projects in support of central Sahel countries. The meeting noted the global shifts that are challenging multilateral cooperation and funding for development initiatives and called for a reimagining of the role of the United Nations amid rising insecurity, democratic backsliding and economic challenges.

## **E. Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission**

68. The Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission made significant progress in implementing the International Court of Justice judgment on the land and maritime boundary between the two countries. To address the three outstanding areas of disagreement, the Sub-Commission on Demarcation and the Project Steering Committee met in Geneva from 24 August to 1 September, with the facilitation of the good offices of the Special Representative. The meeting successfully resolved all outstanding issues and laid the groundwork for the final phase of construction of the boundary pillars along the border. Key outcomes, collectively referred to as the

“Geneva Agreement 2025”, included agreement on the provisional boundary line and coordinates, as well as the endorsement of the terms of reference for an upcoming field assessment mission. Preparations for the final phase of pillar construction, set to begin in January 2026, were also completed.

69. Discussions are ongoing with the parties to ensure adherence to agreed timelines, strengthen national ownership and establish mechanisms for sustainable boundary management. To support cross-border cooperation, a unified integrated programme document is being developed with the United Nations country teams in Cameroon and Nigeria. The document will guide joint resource mobilization efforts and ensure coherent implementation of cross-border peacebuilding and development initiatives.

#### **IV. Observations and recommendations**

70. The further deterioration of the security situation in West Africa and the Sahel is deeply alarming. Terrorist and violent extremist groups continue to pose a significant threat to regional States by expanding their reach, employing sophisticated weaponry to disrupt services and destabilize economies. Their actions, combined with organized crime, have intensified displacement, weakened State authority and fuelled instability. As border communities become flashpoints, urgent action is required to strengthen cross-border governance, enhance community engagement and promote social cohesion to address perceptions of marginalization that fuel recruitment by terrorist and extremist groups. I also call upon Guinea and Sierra Leone to find a peaceful solution to the Yenga border dispute, to maintain cross-border solidarity and cohesion.

71. The surge in terrorist attacks in the region, including western Mali, Nigeria and the W-Arly-Pendjari Complex spanning Benin, Burkina Faso and the Niger demands collective and regional response. In this spirit, I commend the joint efforts by Benin, Burkina Faso and the Niger to enhance cross-border cooperation of member States of the region to bridge divides and find new ways to address these common transnational threats. I urge regional partners and Member States to sustain this momentum and accelerate their efforts towards operationalizing mechanisms, including the ECOWAS Standby Force, to help counter terrorism.

72. I take note of the elections in Côte d’Ivoire and Guinea-Bissau. As other countries prepare for upcoming polls, I urge stakeholders to prioritize inclusive dialogue and peaceful resolution of political grievances. I also note the commitment by Guinea to hold elections by the end of 2025 and encourage peaceful, inclusive and credible polls, with broad stakeholder participation and public trust in the process.

73. I commend regional Governments that have been working to advance accountability and combat corruption. However, reports of intensified restrictions on civic freedoms and human rights in several countries is of deep concern. Protecting fundamental rights, including safeguarding press freedoms, and fostering inclusive governance are core State responsibilities. The United Nations remains committed to assisting national authorities to strengthen public trust and social cohesion. I renew my call upon the Gambia to expedite implementation of its Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission recommendations and resume efforts to usher in a new constitution reflective of its peoples’ aspirations.

74. While progress has been made in promoting the participation of women and youth, in political and peace processes, persistent structural barriers, limited resources and weak institutional support continue to constrain their meaningful inclusion. I call for renewed efforts to ensure the full, equal and meaningful participation of women

and youth in decision-making and peacebuilding. Integrated strategies linking education, vocational training and employment creation should be prioritized to expand opportunities and foster long-term stability.

75. Youth unemployment, inequality and insecurity continue to hinder inclusive growth. Addressing these challenges requires bold economic diversification, targeted job creation and sustainable rural development. The 10 flagship programmes in the areas of food security, renewable energy, education and youth employment under the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel offer a road map for transformation. I urge partners to ensure full and timely funding and encourage Mali and Burkina Faso to follow the example of the Niger in launching their programmes. I also recognize water as a strategic resource for the region and welcome efforts to reform food systems and build climate resilience.

76. Climate-induced shocks continue to exacerbate instability across the region. I urge stakeholders to adopt integrated approaches that link climate adaptation, resilience-building and conflict prevention, with strong community participation and attention to the needs of vulnerable communities. I also appeal to the international community to expand access to climate financing for affected countries and align such support with national development priorities.

77. The humanitarian situation, particularly in the Sahel, remains dire, with millions lacking essential services. As resources shrink globally, the needs of the most vulnerable must not be overlooked. I urge international partners to fully fund humanitarian appeals and provide coordinated, timely support. In this regard, I also call for the full implementation of Security Council resolution [2601 \(2021\)](#), which underscores the vital importance of protecting education in conflict settings.

78. The resolution of long-standing disagreements during the Geneva meetings marks a significant breakthrough in advancing the full implementation of the International Court of Justice judgment on the Cameroon-Nigeria border dispute. I urge both parties to formalize their commitments through a jointly agreed implementation road map to guide progress through this critical phase.

79. The United Nations remains firmly committed to peace and democratic governance in West Africa and the Sahel. I thank ECOWAS, the African Union and all regional partners for their continued collaboration with UNOWAS, and extend deep appreciation to the Special Representative, to the Special Coordinator for Development in the Sahel, to UNOWAS and to the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission staff for their dedication.

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