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# Security Council

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

### Report of the Secretary-General

#### I. Introduction

1. The present report covers the period from 1 January to 30 June 2024 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. The period under review was marked by continuing transition processes in countries that have experienced unconstitutional changes of government, positive electoral processes in some coastal States and a security and humanitarian environment that remains precarious. The announcement on 28 January by Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger of their decision to withdraw, with immediate effect, from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), further raised questions regarding the future of the ECOWAS regionalism agenda. The three countries criticized ECOWAS for not helping them to fight terrorism and insecurity, but rather imposing severe and inhumane sanctions on them. Overtures of reconciliation, such as the lifting of some sanctions and calls for dialogue, have been made by ECOWAS in order to avert a definite exit of the three countries by the stipulated one-year formal notification period. Meanwhile, the decision of the three countries to withdraw from ECOWAS has further reduced the momentum for return to constitutional rule, as the recently concluded national dialogues in Burkina Faso and Mali ended with recommendations supporting the extensions of the transition to 2029 and 2027, respectively. Amid stringent restrictions to the civic and political space, the transitional authorities in Guinea have also confirmed that the timeline for the return to constitutional order will not be met, leading to heightened tensions with the political opposition. In addition, there was a resurgence of inter-State tensions, as evidenced by the bilateral crisis between Benin and the Niger, as well as between Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire.



3. In positive developments, the democratic transfer of power following the elections in Liberia and Senegal ushered in new leadership, who are articulating policies to translate popular aspirations for change. For instance, following the pre-electoral tensions in Senegal, the new Government has announced a programme of reforms, including an ambition to play a role in ECOWAS reforms.

4. On security, despite localized improvements, the overall situation in the region remained precarious, especially in the central Sahel, leading to an ongoing reconfiguration of their international partnerships. Regarding the human rights situation, severe restrictions to the freedoms of expression and of assembly in various countries increasingly limited civic and political space. The humanitarian situation remains concerning, as civilian populations continued to be gravely affected by insecurity, while the number of displaced persons has increased. Schools and health services are non-operational owing to insecurity.

## **A. Politics and governance**

5. In Benin, following a ruling by the Constitutional Court on 4 January highlighting inconsistencies in the electoral code, the National Assembly adopted a revised electoral code on 5 March. The revised code requires presidential candidates to be sponsored by at least 15 per cent (up from 10 per cent previously) of parliamentarians or mayors in at least three fifths of the electoral districts. Moreover, to obtain seats in Parliament or at municipal assemblies, a political party must now obtain 20 per cent of votes cast at the national level (up from 10 per cent). Opposition parties and civil society organizations have expressed concerns that the amendments would negatively impact the inclusivity and representativity of the electoral process. Benin is scheduled to hold its first general elections in 2026.

6. In Burkina Faso, the transitional authorities continued to prioritize the restoration of security and regaining control of territory lost to militant groups and have thus not announced a new date for the elections, which were initially scheduled for July 2024. On 27 March, 11 civil society organizations called on the transitional authorities to respect the Constitution and to unconditionally release arbitrarily detained persons, following similar messages by trade unions, political parties, prominent individuals and diaspora movements. On 11 May, other civil society groups declared their continued support for the transitional authorities. On 25 May, the transitional authorities convened a national dialogue process that concluded with the signing of a new transition charter extending the transition for an additional 60 months, until July 2029.

7. In Cabo Verde, the Government maintained its focus on sustainable development and, on 5 February, signed a cooperation framework with business actors to promote growth and employment. On 8 and 9 April, the Government hosted an international conference on enhancing democracy, good governance and fundamental freedoms. In his capacity as Patron of the Ocean Decade Alliance of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, on 10 April, the President, José Maria Pereira Neves, called for action to address climate change, illegal fishing and trafficking, among other pressing issues, at the 2024 Ocean Decade Conference, held in Barcelona.

8. From 1 to 30 April, the Independent Electoral Commission of Côte d'Ivoire updated the mapping of constituencies in view of the 2025 presidential election. While this precedes an update of the voter registry, opposition actors have criticized the outcome, citing territorial imbalances. In addition, the Parti des peuples africains – Côte d'Ivoire, designated the former President, Laurent Gbagbo, as its flagbearer. He is, however, ineligible to run for the election owing to a criminal conviction. On

22 February 2024, the President, Alassane Ouattara, pardoned 51 individuals convicted in the context of the 2020 post-electoral crisis. Most of those pardoned were supporters of Mr. Gbagbo and the former Speaker of the National Assembly, Guillaume Soro.

9. In the Gambia, further progress was made in the implementation of the recommendations of the Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission. On 29 February, the Gambia and ECOWAS launched a Joint Technical Committee to establish a hybrid court to prosecute those responsible for gross human rights violations committed during the tenure of the former President, Yahya Jammeh. Furthermore, on 22 April, the National Assembly adopted two bills to establish a Special Prosecutor's Office and a Special Accountability Mechanism. Amid these developments, on 15 March, the President, Adama Barrow, reshuffled his Cabinet, with six Ministries affected, while retaining the only three women in the Cabinet. The constitutional review process also progressed. On 28 May, the Cabinet commenced its review of the proposed amendments to the 2020 draft constitution, as submitted by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance following consultations with political parties and other relevant stakeholders. It remains uncertain whether the Government's timeline for holding a constitutional referendum before the end of 2024 can be met, considering the legal steps required ahead of the referendum.

10. In Ghana, the National Democratic Congress returned to the Inter Party Advisory Committee of the Electoral Commission on 22 January, following a three-year boycott over a perceived lack of neutrality of the Electoral Commission. The participation of the National Democratic Congress in the Committee has instilled renewed confidence in the electoral process ahead of the upcoming general elections in December. On 7 March, the Electoral Commission published the electoral calendar. The same day, the National Democratic Congress flagbearer, a former President, John Mahama, chose Naana Jane Opoku-Agyemang, a former Minister of Education, as his running mate.

11. In Guinea, the new Prime Minister, Amadou Oury Bah, appointed on 27 February, stated that the transitional authorities should remain in place "until at least 2025", overriding the agreed timeline for holding elections at all levels in 2024. Despite the continuing ban on public demonstrations since 2022, Mr. Bah's declaration sparked public anger, calls for protests and strong condemnation from the main opposition parties. On 20 March, political and civil society actors reiterated calls for an inclusive dialogue and respect for a transition timeline and warned that they would not recognize the transitional institutions beyond 31 December 2024. Meanwhile, prevailing repression of civil and political rights sparked violent protests in Conakry on 1 February and in Kindia on 12 March, causing the temporary suspension of classes in schools and universities and compounding socioeconomic challenges.

12. In Guinea-Bissau, political tensions persisted following the dissolution of Parliament by the President, Umaro Sissoco Embaló, in December 2023. On 21 February, the former Prime Minister, Nuno Nabiam, resigned from his position as Special Adviser to the President, citing "constant interference of the President in the functioning of the country's democratic institutions", among other grievances. Amid uncertainty regarding the electoral calendar, the Ministry of Territorial Administration undertook the routine update of the voter registry in the country and diaspora from 25 March to 25 June. After publicly distancing themselves from President Embaló, the Party for Social Renewal (PRS), the United People's Assembly-Democratic Party of Guinea-Bissau and the Movement for Democratic Change (MADEM-G15) announced a new Forum for the Salvation of Democracy on 28 March. The Forum joined calls by the African Party for the Independence of Guinea-Bissau and Cabo Verde (PAIGC) for, inter alia: the full re-opening of Parliament and the holding of the presidential election only in 2024.

13. In Liberia, the President, Joseph Boakai, was sworn in on 22 January. Declaring the fight against corruption as a priority, on 6 March, he decreed the establishment of a task force to recover State assets. Following a joint parliamentary resolution, on 2 May, President Boakai signed an executive order establishing the Office of a War and Economic Crimes Court for Liberia. Prior to the parliamentary vote, the Senator and former warlord, Prince Johnson, warned of “risks of destabilization” but later retracted his statement.

14. In Mali, on 25 January, the transitional Government announced the immediate termination of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali. Following the indefinite postponement of the presidential election initially scheduled for 27 February, the transitional Government initiated some technical preparations, including the launch of a biometric registration system. Marking the date of the conclusion of the transition period previously agreed with ECOWAS on 26 March, political parties and civil society actors called for a return to constitutional order. On 10 and 11 April, the transitional authorities suspended political party activities “until further notice”. Key political parties and civil society actors subsequently boycotted the inter-Malian dialogue launched by the authorities on 13 April. The dialogue ended on 10 May, with the adoption of 300 recommendations, including extending the military-led transition by three years. Several political parties and civil society organizations, which boycotted the dialogue, denounced those recommendations, accusing the transitional authorities of exploiting the dialogue to stay in power.

15. In Mauritania, preparations for the presidential election scheduled for 29 June proceeded peacefully, following national consultations organized by the Government from 9 to 15 March to promote an inclusive and transparent process. On an official visit to Nouakchott on 15 April, a Malian ministerial delegation discussed cross-border security incidents, inter alia, with the President, Mohamed Ould Cheikh El Ghazouani. On 20 April, a Mauritanian delegation headed by the Minister of Defence travelled to Bamako to officially protest multiple incidents that targeted Mauritanian civilians during military operations reportedly carried out by Malian armed forces and their foreign partners. Meanwhile, during the thirty-seventh ordinary session of the Assembly of the Heads of State and Government of the African Union on 17 February, President El Ghazouani was officially elected Chairperson of the African Union Assembly of Heads of State and Government for 2024.

16. In the Niger, on 8 January, a military court granted provisional release to Saleh Bazoum, the 22-year-old son of the former President, Mohamed Bazoum, who has since left the country, whereas the former President, his wife and other persons remain unlawfully detained at the presidential residence. General Abdourahamane Tiani, Transitional President of the Niger and head of the National Council for the Safeguarding of the Homeland (CNSP), signed a decree dissolving municipal, regional and city councils on 4 April. On 14 June, the State Court decided to lift the immunity of the former Head of State, who is facing charges including “conspiracy and attack aimed at undermining State security or State authority and the crime of high treason”.

17. In Nigeria, against the background of rising insecurity and kidnappings for ransom, including in the Federal Capital Territory, on 15 February, the Government called for the establishment of State-level police forces, pending constitutional amendments that allow for their establishment. On 25 February, the President, Bola Ahmed Tinubu, established a tripartite economic advisory panel consisting of the Federal and State governments, as well as the private sector, to stabilize the economy and address hardships compounded by rising inflation in the context of economic reforms. On 26 February, the House of Representatives inaugurated a 45-member committee tasked to propose, by December 2025, a constitutional review in several areas, including the national security architecture, as well as judicial, electoral and other reforms.

18. In Senegal, on 3 February, the President, Macky Sall, issued a decree cancelling the presidential election initially scheduled for 25 February, highlighting ongoing parliamentary debates on the forthcoming electoral process and allegations of irregularities in the validation of presidential candidates by the Constitutional Council as justifications. On 5 February, the National Assembly adopted a constitutional amendment rescheduling the presidential election to 15 December 2024. In response, opposition and civil society groups organized a series of nationwide demonstrations to protest the postponement. On 15 February, the Constitutional Council overturned the 3 February decree and the 5 February constitutional amendment, ruling both legislative acts to be unconstitutional. In a second ruling, dated 7 March, it decreed that the electoral process had to be completed prior to the end of President Sall's mandate on 2 April. Concurrently, the National Assembly adopted an amnesty law on 6 March covering protest-related or politically motivated offences committed from 2021 to 2024. Consequently, the opposition leader, Ousmane Sonko, and presidential candidate Bassirou Diomaye Faye were released on 14 March. The presidential election took place peacefully on 24 March, with Mr. Faye securing a first-round victory with 54 per cent of the votes. All 19 presidential candidates conceded victory prior to the validation of results by the Constitutional Council on 29 March. Following his swearing-in on 2 April, President Faye appointed Mr. Sonko as Prime Minister, who unveiled on 8 April a new 25-member Government. The new Government, which includes four women, declared employment, alleviation of living costs, economic sovereignty, as well as electoral, judicial and other institutional reforms as the government's priorities.

19. In Sierra Leone, on 3 January, the former President, Ernest Bai Koroma, was indicted for treason and other charges relating to the alleged coup attempt of 26 November 2023. Following ECOWAS intervention, he travelled to Abuja on 19 January, on medical grounds. Meanwhile, the cross-party committee on electoral systems and management bodies review, established under the Agreement for National Unity of 18 October 2023, started its work on 18 January amid continued wrangling between the representatives of Government and the main opposition party, the All People's Congress, over the 2023 elections results.

20. In Togo, the National Assembly adopted a constitutional amendment bill on 19 April, which provides for a shift from a presidential to a parliamentary system of government. Under the reform, the President of the Republic, elected by Parliament for a four-year mandate, renewable once, retains powers of representation and acts as the guarantor of national unity, while executive powers are vested in the new role of President of the Council of Ministers. The position of President of the Council of Ministers, who is elected by the National Assembly for six years, is to be held by the leader of the majority party. The move encountered strong resistance from opposition parties and civil society organizations, which highlighted the lack of an inclusive consultative process prior to the adoption of the constitutional amendment bill. Legislative and regional elections, originally scheduled for 13 April but subsequently postponed to 29 April, were held peacefully, with the ruling Union pour la République (UNIR) securing 108 of the 113 seats in the National Assembly. On 6 May, the President, Faure Essozimna Gnassingbé, promulgated the constitutional amendment.

## **B. Security situation**

21. The security situation in the region remained characterized by persistent terrorist activity, and a fragmented regional response, amid political dynamics that impacted the security setting. Violent extremist groups, such as the Al-Qaida-affiliated Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin and Islamic State in the Greater Sahara, maintained strong operational capabilities, especially in the Liptako-Gourma region, attacking civilian and military targets.

22. In the aftermath of the withdrawal of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) and the recapture of Kidal by the Malian Armed Forces, the latter continue to conduct operations against non-State armed actors and respond to complex attacks. Adopting a more defensive posture, the Cadre stratégique permanent pour la paix, comprising several armed groups in northern Mali, in February announced the lifting of its blockade on major roads from the border with Algeria, following an offensive by the Malian army. From 3 to 27 January, Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin and dozo militia reportedly killed 45 civilians, including children, in four separate attacks that occurred in the regions of Mopti and Ségou in central Mali. There were also sporadic incursions from Mali into Mauritania in the context of counter-terrorism operations. On 7 April, a Malian anti-terrorist raid into Mauritanian territory wounded three Mauritanian civilians.

23. Burkina Faso remained the country most affected by terrorist activity, notably by Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin and Islamic State in the Greater Sahara. While there was a reorganization of military forces, the introduction of special intervention units and the acquisition of advanced military equipment, the Government continued to face challenges to reclaim control over extensive swaths of its territory. Major incidents in the reporting period include attacks on civilians in Komonkuy, Kossi province, on 4 February resulting in 21 deaths, in Kaldiouani, Gourma province, on 7 February, leading to 50 deaths, on three villages in Yatenga province on 25 February, resulting in 170 deaths, and on two villages in Komondjari province on 28 February, during which more than 60 civilians were killed. Authorities rejected a report by Human Rights Watch of security forces being involved in the Yatenga killings and announced the launch of an investigation.

24. In the Niger, in an indication of a highly volatile security context, the number of fatalities increased. According to data of the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project, there were 361 conflict-related deaths in the first quarter of 2024, compared with 250 over the same period in 2023. During an air strike to repel a militant attack in Tiawa, Tillabéri region, on 5 January, more than 50 civilians were reportedly killed. Clashes on 19 March between non-State armed actors and a military patrol reportedly resulted in the deaths of approximately 30 militants and 23 soldiers, highlighting the severe impact of these confrontations. Following the withdrawal of French troops, on 16 March, the Niger announced the termination of its military agreements with the United States of America, with both countries agreeing on a withdrawal schedule to be concluded by 15 September. Meanwhile, the Niger has strengthened its military ties with the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Russian Federation and Türkiye, as well as enhancing coordinated military efforts within the Alliance of Sahel States as it maintained the closure of its border with Benin, despite the lifting of ECOWAS sanctions.

25. The Lake Chad basin saw a deterioration in its security environment, impacted by the disruption of joint military operations under the Multinational Joint Task Force following the military coup in the Niger. Concurrently, there was a reported uptick in militant and extremist activities in north-east Nigeria, raising concerns about a potential resurgence of militant and violent extremist groups using suicide-bombing tactics employed earlier by Boko Haram. Nigeria also witnessed increased kidnappings for ransom throughout the country. Two large-scale abductions took place in late February and early March in Borno and Kaduna States, respectively, each involving more than 200 individuals, including internally displaced women and children and students.

26. The situation in the coastal countries along the Gulf of Guinea remained concerning, in particular in northern Benin and Togo, owing to the continued threat posed by violent extremist groups operating from the Central Sahel. On 5 March, in Togo, an attack by suspected terrorists in Nagudi, Savanes region, killed eight

civilians. On 16 and 17 April, in Benin, an attack by unidentified armed individuals against the Monkassa customs post resulted in three deaths, including two civilians and one member of the Beninese security and defence forces. In response to this threat, the littoral States continued to strengthen their northern borders, in particular Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire, which have both developed a comprehensive approach, integrating civilian and military efforts. However, migration from Sahel countries is placing additional pressures on their already vulnerable northern regions, contributing to social tensions and economic challenges.

27. Efforts to forge a coordinated regional response to the growing threat of terrorism and organized crime remained fragmented. Amid shifting alignments, the Accra Initiative, the ECOWAS Standby Force and other collaborative efforts have faced significant hurdles, inter alia due to divergent national priorities and funding constraints.

28. Law enforcement agencies made record high seizures of drugs. In March, 10.6 tons of cocaine were seized on a Brazilian-flagged fishing vessel in the Gulf of Guinea, constituting the largest cocaine seizure in West Africa in more than 10 years. In April, Senegal seized 1.1 tons of cocaine in a truck in Kidira, at the border with Mali, and some political figures of Guinea-Bissau, namely, the Public Prosecutor, Eduardo Mancaha, and a Member of Parliament, Manuel Irénio Nascimento Lopes, were arrested in Lisbon in connection with drug trafficking. On 7 May, in Côte d'Ivoire, 13 individuals were convicted for drug trafficking and sentenced to 10 years in prison, further to the seizure of 2 tons of cocaine in Abidjan and San Pedro in April 2022.

29. Regarding maritime piracy and armed robbery, the trend of a decline in incidents observable over the recent years continued. In the reporting period, until 31 March, only one case has been recorded.

### C. Socioeconomic context

30. In a report issued in April, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) projected improved economic performance for West Africa and the Sahel, forecasting a 4.1 per cent growth rate in 2024. Nonetheless, projections remain contingent on regional and global factors, including the consequences of the announced withdrawal of Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger from ECOWAS and, possibly, the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU). This growth rate is higher than the average from previous years but may still not be sufficient to alleviate poverty in the region and put it on a sustainable development track. In addition, the expected socioeconomic impacts of an eventual exit from ECOWAS likely have various implications, notably in trade between the landlocked countries and their neighbours, free movement of labour and capital mobility and in government revenue, given the heavy reliance of these countries on international trade taxes. According to IMF, debt-to-gross domestic product (GDP) ratios tend to stabilize, but remain high. After two years without access to international capital markets, in January 2024, Côte d'Ivoire successfully launched a new Eurobond, followed by Benin, although interest rates remain high.

31. Overall, progress in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in the region remains slow. In addition, the countries of the Sahel continue to rank at the bottom of the human development index.<sup>1</sup> Jointly, these economic and social conditions represent crucial context factors for the sustained political and security-related challenges of the region.

<sup>1</sup> United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), *Sahel Human Development Report 2023* (available at [www.undp.org/africa/publications/sahel-human-development-report-2023](http://www.undp.org/africa/publications/sahel-human-development-report-2023)); Human development index (see <https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/human-development-index#/indicies/HDI>).



## **D. Humanitarian context**

32. The humanitarian situation in West Africa and the Sahel continued to deteriorate, with a series of multidimensional and interconnected crises resulting in a slight increase in people in need. According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 25.8 million people in Burkina Faso, Mali, the Niger and Nigeria need humanitarian assistance and protection in 2024.

33. Throughout the region, 32.9 million people were food-insecure from March to May, compared with 28.4 million during the same period in 2023, primarily due to an aggravation of the situation in Burkina Faso, Mali, the Niger and Nigeria. Proportionally, the largest increases were in Nigeria and Guinea, at 41 and 67 per cent, respectively.

34. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the scale of displacement, both internal and cross-border, has also increased. As at 31 March, there were more than 6.2 million internally displaced persons throughout Burkina Faso, Mali, the Niger and Nigeria, up from approximately 5 million in the previous report. In addition, as at 19 April, there were approximately 630,000 refugees and asylum-seekers in these four countries, in addition to approximately 127,000 in Mauritania and approximately 120,861 in Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Togo combined.

35. Insecurity also impacted access to basic services. As at 23 May, the number of schools closed remained high, at 8,216 throughout Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger, more than half of which were in Burkina Faso, and affected nearly 1.62 million children. In addition, 478 health centres were non-functional in the three countries.

36. Ensuring access to basic services, especially for the most vulnerable, including women and girls, children and displaced persons, remains a priority. The operating context for humanitarian agencies was difficult owing to insecurity, limitations of access and other logistical constraints, especially in the central Sahel. Furthermore, of the \$3.2 billion needed for the humanitarian response plans for Burkina Faso, Mali, the Niger and Nigeria, targeting 15 million people, only 13 per cent had been received as at 23 May. Without additional funding, millions of vulnerable people will be left without vital support.

## **E. Human rights**

37. The overall human rights situation remained marked by the continued erosion of civic and political space, especially in countries undergoing political transitions. In these countries, protests were banned and freedoms of expression increasingly curtailed. In the Niger, activities of the Maison de la Presse were suspended on 31 January. In Guinea, on 28 February, the Secretary-General of the Syndicat des professionnels de la presse de Guinée, Sékou Jamal Pendessa, was sentenced on appeal to three months' imprisonment, consisting of one month and six days' detention and a suspended prison sentence, for participating in an unauthorized public gathering and threatening public order and security. He was released on 28 February. The announcement of his sentencing triggered a two-day demonstration demanding his release. Concerning the situation in Mali, the Independent Expert on the situation of human rights in Mali decried an environment of "systematic repression". This was in response to the Government prohibiting associations from forming without prior authorization, suspending the activities of political parties to "maintain public order" and directing all media to stop "broadcasting and publishing the activities" of political parties and associations. Several other actors publicly expressed concerns over the Government's decisions, including the National Human Rights Commission of Mali,

the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights and several political parties in Mali. In Burkina Faso, several instances of enforced disappearance and arbitrary detention were documented. Human rights defenders also claimed that, under the country's general mobilization, civil society activists and political opponents were forcibly conscripted.

38. Similarly, the right to freedom of assembly was subject to restrictions in the Gambia, Mauritania, Senegal and Togo. According to official sources, at least 50 people were killed in Guinea and 4 in Senegal in the context of unauthorized protests. In Guinea-Bissau, demonstrations were banned nationwide beginning 15 January. On 18 May, nearly 100 protesters were detained by the Public Order Police for holding a peaceful march, convened by the Popular Front. Most detainees were released within 24 hours, except for nine individuals, who were released on 27 May after a judge ordered their immediate release on 24 May. Some of the detainees alleged that they were physically and psychologically mistreated in prison by security forces. The Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers raised serious concerns regarding the intimidation of lawyers, prosecutors and judges involved in the trial of those detained in connection with the thwarted coup of February 2022. One of the detainees died in detention on 31 May.

39. The Gambia and Liberia made important steps towards establishing mechanisms to address impunity in the context of transitional justice. The trial in Guinea for crimes committed during the 28 September 2009 stadium massacre in Conakry has seen significant progress and approached the verdict phase. The reclassification of the crimes as crimes against humanity will be considered at the time of the verdict following a request introduced by the prosecution on 7 March. The trial also faced challenges in terms of the protection of victims and witnesses, especially as a key suspect, Claude Pivi, remains at large after escaping from prison in November 2023. The Guinean authorities are working on a law on administrative reparations for victims in urgent need. In Senegal, the amnesty law adopted by the National Assembly on 6 March led to the release of numerous detainees. However, the law raised concerns over impunity and a lack of adequate judicial recourse for the approximately 44 people killed from 2021 to 2024 in the context of political demonstrations. In the Gambia, on 30 May, two opposition United Democratic Party members, Ebrima Dibba and Bakary Sillah, were arrested and detained on sedition charges. They were later released on bail on 4 June. Their case has since been brought to court, where hearings are ongoing.

## **F. Gender**

40. There was no noteworthy progress on women's representation in decision-making bodies in the reporting period. The proportion of women in the newly appointed governments in Guinea and Senegal decreased as compared with the previous administrations. Civil society organizations and women leaders advocated for greater women's political representation in countries holding elections in 2024. For instance, in a meeting with the President of Benin, Patrice Talon, the 29 women Members of Parliament demanded a 30 per cent quota for the representation of women in the National Assembly and local government. In the central Sahel, women's organizations called for stronger participation of women in transitional structures.

41. In the Gambia, ongoing parliamentary deliberations of a private member's bill seeking to repeal a 2015 ban on female genital mutilation triggered concerns about threats to women's and girls' human rights, well-being and bodily autonomy amid a general backsliding of girls' and women's rights. In Ghana, Parliament passed a private member's bill on "Human sexual rights and Ghanaian family values" that would introduce wide-ranging restrictions on LGBTIQ+ rights. The President has yet

to act on the bill, citing pending cases in the Supreme Court challenging the constitutionality of the bill.

### **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**

42. Amid a fast-evolving regional situation, the Special Representative undertook regional and international advocacy and good offices engagements, working closely with resident coordinators and United Nations country teams to support ECOWAS-led mediation initiatives in transition settings and to assist countries of the region in advancing democratic governance, fostering sustainable development, addressing humanitarian needs and consolidating peace.

43. Throughout the period, the Special Representative closely engaged with the President of the ECOWAS Commission to facilitate rapprochement between the organization and the three Sahelian member States undergoing transition, namely Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger. In the wake of the announcement by these three transitional governments of their withdrawal from ECOWAS, the Special Representative advocated constructive dialogue in the interest of peace and the needs of the people concerned. He participated in the extraordinary ministerial session of the Mediation and Security Council of ECOWAS and the extraordinary summit of the Authority of Heads of State and Government of ECOWAS, held in Abuja on 8 and 24 February, respectively, at which he cautioned that the withdrawal might exacerbate existing political, security and socioeconomic challenges in the subregion and welcomed the reconciliatory measures adopted by the Authority. Subsequently, the Heads of State and Government of ECOWAS lifted a large part of the sanctions against the Niger and the restrictions against Mali and invited the four countries undergoing political transition to attend technical and security-related meetings while maintaining their suspension from key decision-making structures.

44. To facilitate dialogue between the countries of the central Sahel and ECOWAS, the Special Representative visited Burkina Faso, the Niger and Mali from 5 to 8 March, 25 to 29 March and 29 to 31 May, respectively, for consultations with national authorities, diplomatic and United Nations partners and civil society. In all three countries, the Special Representative, while acknowledging their national sovereignty, encouraged the authorities to engage in dialogue with ECOWAS to safeguard the gains of regional integration. He underscored the paramount importance of humanitarian access in alleviating suffering and reaffirmed the United Nations commitment to stay and deliver. In Niamey, he stressed the need for a dedicated ministry in charge of gender, given warnings by women's organizations regarding fears of a regression in gender equality and women's empowerment.

45. Against the backdrop of pre-electoral tensions in Senegal, the Special Representative engaged in consultations with a wide range of Senegalese political and electoral stakeholders to help restore peaceful coexistence and prevent further escalation of violent protests. The Special Representative also met with the Resident Coordinator to ensure a coherent approach among national and regional United Nations entities in Dakar. In his meetings with stakeholders, the Special Representative stressed the need to ensure that elections were held in a timely fashion in accordance with constitutional provisions, through inclusive dialogue among political actors and institutions. He also underscored the need to preserve the democratic credentials of Senegal as a critical asset for regional stability.

46. On the margins of the summit of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, held in Banjul, on 3 and 4 May, the Special Representative met with the Ministers of Foreign Affairs and of Justice of the Gambia, among other partners, promoting support for the transitional justice process. The Ministers provided assurances to undertake all efforts to ensure that the bill on decriminalizing female genital mutilation is not adopted.

47. The Special Representative continued to promote best practices regarding the commitment of Cabo Verde to democratic governance. On 8 and 9 April, he attended the International Conference on Freedom, Democracy and Good Governance in Sal, where he reaffirmed United Nations support for a regional youth platform following up on the “Mindelo call to action for empowering young women and men for sustaining peace and security in West Africa and the Sahel”, adopted at the West Africa and Sahel Youth Forum, organized by Cabo Verde, ECOWAS and UNOWAS in 2023.

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

48. In his capacity as Chair of the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission, the Special Representative held bilateral consultations on 6 February and on 5 and 6 March in Nigeria and Cameroon, respectively, during which the parties agreed not to refer the remaining areas of disagreement back to the International Court of Justice, as they had earlier intended, and instead reiterated their commitment to cooperation. Physical demarcation of the boundary also made progress as planned, with the erection of an additional 254 pillars, leaving 229 pillars still to be constructed out of an anticipated total of 2,696. Regarding peacebuilding and community development, the International Organization for Migration supported the finalization of needs assessments benefiting 169 villages in the two countries.

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

49. UNOWAS bolstered its collaborative efforts throughout West Africa and the Sahel with the United Nations and other regional partners. On 8 and 9 February, UNOWAS held desk-to-desk meetings with the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa (UNOCA) in Libreville, reviewing joint workplans for initiatives pertaining to climate security, human rights and the stabilization of the Lake Chad Basin, inter alia. On 22 and 23 February, UNOWAS participated in a regional consultative meeting in Abuja to establish the Economic, Social and Cultural Council in West Africa, which aims to enhance the role of civil society in ECOWAS decision-making processes.

50. On 21 March, UNOWAS participated in a regional dialogue on national security and refugee protection in Lomé, organized by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the Government of Togo, emphasizing the need for strengthened cooperation among States of the region and partners. On 9 and 10 May, UNOWAS and ECOWAS held desk-to-desk meetings in Dakar, which featured a principal-level exchange in keeping with the provisions of their memorandum of understanding, signed on 8 February, as well as a joint engagement with the United Nations regional directors.

### **1. Dynamics between farmers and herders**

51. UNOWAS continued to collaborate with UNOCA and ECOWAS on addressing cross-regional challenges related to farmer-herder dynamics. In addition, UNOWAS,

UNOCA and partners developed a multilingual repository of good practices and a farmers-herders handbook, which have been submitted to ECOWAS for endorsement.

## **2. Lake Chad Basin**

52. Following the decisions of the steering committee for the Regional Strategy for the Stabilization, Recovery and Resilience of the Boko Haram-affected areas of the Lake Chad Basin Region in September 2023, an assessment of the five years of implementation of the Strategy began in March.

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

53. Following the Special Representative's two meetings with the Secretary-General of the Mano River Union in 2023, UNOWAS and the Union signed a 2024–2026 cooperation framework on 1 March. The framework is aimed at supporting the implementation of the Union's cross-border security strategy.

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

54. UNOWAS continued to engage with partners on the evaluation of the operationalization of the Yaoundé maritime security architecture. On 9 April, the Special Representative visited the newly operationalized Multinational Maritime Coordination Centre in Cabo Verde, during which he commended Cabo Verdean authorities for their commitment to combating illicit maritime activities and pledged further United Nations support.

55. On 18 April, UNOWAS participated in the 4th annual meeting of senior officials of institutions of the Interregional Coordination Centre for the Implementation of Regional Strategy for Maritime Safety and Security in Central and West Africa, held in Abuja, and assessed the Centre's operations and areas for its revitalization. As a key outcome, the meeting approved and adopted the proposed action plans for the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) to support the revision of the Code of Conduct concerning the Repression of Piracy, Armed Robbery against Ships and Illicit Maritime Activity in West and Central Africa (Yaoundé Code of Conduct), as well as for UNOCA and UNOWAS to support the evaluation of the Yaoundé Architecture. On 23 April, UNOWAS, UNOCA and UNODC held a coordination meeting to propose a way forward for these exercises.

## **5. Terrorism and violent extremism**

56. At its 24 February summit, the ECOWAS Authority decided to operationalize the ECOWAS Standby Force to combat terrorism. This would include a link to the Multinational Joint Task Force against Boko Haram and the emerging force under the Accra Initiative as operational tools. Subsequently, on 19 and 20 March, the ECOWAS Commission deployed a technical mission to the Executive Secretariat of the Accra Initiative, in Accra, to further deepen operational collaboration. Meanwhile, on 6 March, the Chiefs of Defence Staff from Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger, met in Niamey to discuss a coordinated framework for combating terrorism among the three countries.

57. In cooperation with UNODC, from 12 to 16 February, UNOWAS undertook a mission to Côte d'Ivoire to assess challenges and best practices in the prevention of violent extremism. The team visited the International Counter-Terrorism Academy in Jacquville and other entities and highlighted the potential role of Côte d'Ivoire as a key counter-terrorism ally in the region, capitalizing on its comprehensive approach.

58. To strengthen regional cooperation and institution-building to address the evolving threat of terrorism in Africa, the Government of Nigeria organized a high-

level African counter-terrorism meeting, with support from the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism, in Abuja on 22 and 23 April. The Special Representative participated in this event and held bilateral meetings on the margins with high-level representatives of Ghana, Nigeria, the African Union and ECOWAS and secured their support to leverage the Accra Initiative to foster relations between the central Sahel and coastal countries.

## **6. Adverse implications of climate change**

59. UNOWAS continued to advance implementation of the 2022 Dakar Call to Action, focusing on enhancing partnerships and analytical research. From 7 to 10 February, UNOCA and UNOWAS developed a joint action plan on climate, peace and security, with activities planned for implementation throughout 2024 that include undertaking joint risk assessments in the Gulf of Guinea and Lake Chad Basin countries. UNOWAS and UNOCA also supported ECOWAS and ECCAS, respectively, in reviewing and developing transhumance protocols. In addition, during a workshop in Abuja from 13 to 15 February, UNOWAS contributed to the development of the ECOWAS Regional Resilience Strategy for West Africa, which entails policies at the regional, national and community levels.

60. In May, UNOWAS produced a strategic document entitled “Pathways from climate change to conflicts and the disturbance of peace”, which outlines the interlinkages between climate change and peace and security and identifies key pathways for UNOWAS engagement with partners.

61. To strengthen partnerships through collaboration, UNOWAS participated in the first United Nations high-level strategic dialogue on climate peace and security, held from 3 to 5 May in Stockholm, where discussions were focused on entry points for good offices mediation, community-based conflict resolution, the use of water diplomacy, access to climate action finance and ways to strengthen regional-level initiatives and analyses. Also in Stockholm, from 6 to 8 May, UNOWAS participated in the forum on peace and development, showcasing good practices on the integration of the Office’s climate action initiatives in West Africa and the Sahel. During a regional forum held in Abuja on 25 and 26 May, UNOWAS contributed to the production of the 2024 seasonal weather forecasts for the Sahelian zones of West Africa. The forum also established a regional working group on climate change and security, coordinated by the Liptako-Gourma Authority, ECOWAS and UNOWAS, *inter alia*.

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

62. On 17 April, UNOWAS and UNODC launched a research report on drug trafficking in the Sahel as part of the Transnational Organized Crime Threat Assessment – Sahel project. The report highlights an increasing number of significant cocaine seizures involving Sahel countries, from an average of 13 kg per year in the period 2015–2020 to 1,466 kg in 2022, with the bulk reported in Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger. The report also documents the involvement of various armed groups in drug trafficking, undermining peace and stability in the region.

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

63. UNOWAS continued to engage with the Office of the Special Coordinator for Development in the Sahel and other United Nations entities, in strengthening the governance structure of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel. Enhancement of United Nations capacity to implement the humanitarian-development-peace and security nexus led to the establishment of a platform for

informal policy dialogue between the United Nations and non-governmental organizations in the Sahel, and the creation of a community of practice on the nexus in January. In addition, from 23 to 29 March, the Special Coordinator and the Assistant Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme conducted missions to Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mali and Mauritania, advocating for government involvement in development initiatives aligned with the 2030 agenda. On 24 and 25 June, the 16th meeting of the Steering Committee for the strategy was held in Dakar. The Steering Committee analysed the implications of the significant changes throughout the region for the engagement with Member States as well as for the United Nations footprint and business model. It further examined the role of the strategy as an overarching strategy to guide the United Nations in its partnerships, in particular, with financial institutions, to address cross-border challenges, and in its approaches to resource mobilization.

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

64. UNOWAS continued to collaborate with its partners in promoting good governance, human rights, the rule of law and gender mainstreaming. On 25 January, in cooperation with the Dakar-based Regional Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, UNOWAS organized a meeting on human rights challenges in the context of electoral processes. In preparation for the legislative elections in Togo, UNOWAS provided technical support to the National Human Rights Commission of Togo in upholding the rights to freedom of expression and assembly. In addition, from 26 February to 1 March, UNOWAS and the National Youth Council of Togo organized a workshop in Lomé that resulted in the adoption by more than 100 stakeholders of a declaration committing to peaceful elections.

65. From 25 to 27 April, in Dakar, UNOWAS facilitated the participation of non-governmental organizations in the first Joint Forum of the Special Mechanisms of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights. From 11 to 13 May, in Banjul, the Office supported the organization of the forum of non-governmental organizations preceding the seventy-ninth session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights.

66. On gender mainstreaming, on 4 March, UNOWAS, the African Development Bank and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) organized an online forum on women's and girls' economic empowerment, at which participants identified collaborative strategies and actions for promoting women's entrepreneurship and economic inclusion. UNOWAS continued to support the Working Group on Women, Youth, Peace and Security in West Africa and the Sahel. At a virtual meeting with UN-Women on 27 February, the Group highlighted the need to defend women's and young people's rights amid the ongoing transitions following unconstitutional changes of government and security challenges in the Sahel, while recalling the importance of civil society engagement. At two thematic exchange sessions on 18 April and 21 May, the implementation of the UNOWAS gender mainstreaming mandate was reviewed, inter alia. From 22 to 24 April, UNOWAS participated in the first annual meeting of the ECOWAS Women, Peace and Security Regional Steering Group to advance monitoring and reporting on the women and peace and security agenda.

67. On youth and peace and security, from 27 to 29 May, UNOWAS, ECOWAS and the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding organized the Youth Voices for Change Summit in Cotonou, focusing on digital innovation to promote inclusivity, in line with the relevant ECOWAS and African Union policy frameworks. On 6 and 7 and 13 and

14 June, within the framework of the United Nations peace and development trust fund project on enhancing national youth and peace and security capacities in West Africa, UNOWAS and UNFPA launched the youth and peace and security national coalitions in Liberia and Benin, respectively. The coalitions, which comprise national authorities and youth groups, will coordinate efforts at the country level on the development of national action plans on youth and peace and security, thereby applying localized approaches to the implementation of resolutions [2250 \(2015\)](#), [2419 \(2018\)](#) and [2535 \(2020\)](#).

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

68. While the West Africa and Sahel region is facing complex challenges marked by insecurity in large swaths of the Sahel, insufficient progress in sustainable development and democratic reversals, coupled with lack of progress on the return to constitutional order in countries undergoing political transition, I remain encouraged by the continued strengthening of democratic governance in some countries, notably in Senegal, where the role of the Constitutional Council in the resolution of the pre-electoral tensions has again demonstrated the criticality of rule of law-based accountable and inclusive institutions. Ghana also demonstrated the strength of its democratic institutions, including through intra-party nomination processes. I welcome the national reconciliation efforts in Côte d'Ivoire and appeal to national stakeholders and electoral management bodies to ensure that preparations for the upcoming elections in 2025 are inclusive and participatory.

69. I reiterate my call to political actors in Sierra Leone to engage constructively towards the full implementation of the letter and spirit of the Agreement for National Unity to further consolidate peace. Tensions surrounding the constitutional reform process in Togo are a reminder that democratic governance depends on an inclusive deliberative process that confers legitimacy on the process, strengthens institutions and reinforces the social contract between Governments and citizens.

70. I also urge political stakeholders in Guinea-Bissau to engage in constructive dialogue towards the restoration of national institutions, creating an enabling environment for re-engagement on crucial reforms that buttress national cohesion and stability.

71. I welcome the important steps forward on constitutional reform in the Gambia and call upon political and national stakeholders to conclude the process and usher in a new Constitution that represents the aspirations of its people. As the transitional justice process in the Gambia continues to make steady progress, I appeal to international partners to lend their full support to this important endeavour of national healing.

72. While the consolidation of its democratic institutions is to be commended, the establishment of the War and Economic Crimes Court in Liberia, more than 20 years after the end of the civil war, highlights the essential need for justice and accountability. I call upon all national actors to cooperate in the process in good faith and on international partners to provide the necessary support. In Guinea, I urge enhanced efforts to build confidence in the ongoing trial for the 28 September 2009 stadium massacre, especially by ensuring the protection of victims, witnesses and other persons at risk and the adequate administration of reparations to victims in urgent need of care.

73. The delays in the restoration of constitutional order in the countries undergoing political transition remain a concern. I reiterate my call on the countries concerned to strengthen their collaboration with regional and international bodies and in this



respect take note of the proposed ECOWAS special summit on the future of regional integration. The Special Representative will remain engaged with all partners to support national and regional efforts for the benefit of affected populations, the return to constitutional order and the long-term consolidation of democracy, the rule of law and stability.

74. Despite localized improvements, widespread insecurity continues to impact negatively on the humanitarian and human rights situation, further aggravating human suffering. It is worrying that regional realignments have reduced the response capacity of the Multinational Joint Task Force, in the wake of the disbanding of the Group of Five for the Sahel and its Joint Task Force, while new coordination mechanisms and capacities, notably under the Accra Initiative, are yet to become operational. I welcome the new impetus provided by the High-Level African Counter-Terrorism Meeting, the declared establishment of a regional Counter-Terrorism Centre in Abuja, the agreement to enhance cooperation between the Mediation and Security Council of ECOWAS and the African Union Peace and Security Council, and the renewed resolve by ECOWAS to operationalize its Standby Force to combat terrorism in line with its 2020–2024 action plan to eradicate terrorism in West Africa. I urge accelerated implementation of these initiatives.

75. Against this background, I call upon Governments of the region and international partners to scale up support for the Regional Stabilization, Recovery and Resilience Strategy for Areas Affected by Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Basin Region, to secure gains in this volatile region. The United Nations will continue to support efforts to address the conditions conducive to terrorism and violent extremism, human rights concerns and humanitarian needs, including through the implementation of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel. In this regard, enhancing investments in sustainable development will be crucial to address many of the key political, security and humanitarian challenges in the region.

76. Beyond the need for holistic approaches, it is imperative that security forces in the region consistently adhere to international humanitarian and human rights law during counter-terrorism operations, whose effectiveness depends on a relationship of trust with populations. To ensure accountability, concerned authorities must promptly establish credible mechanisms to investigate allegations of human rights violations and bring perpetrators to justice.

77. The lack of progress regarding the representation of women in elected and appointed positions remains disappointing. I call upon all stakeholders, in particular Governments and political parties, to promote legislation on women's empowerment and ensure the effective implementation of relevant national action plans, including through the provision of resources for their effective implementation.

78. I welcome the continued progress made by the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission and encourage all parties concerned to accelerate efforts to enable the completion of the Commission's mandate.

79. 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 wish to express my appreciation to ECOWAS, the African Union and all the partners in the region, for their continued cooperation with UNOWAS. I would also like to express my appreciation to the Special Representative and to the staff of UNOWAS and the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission for their continuing efforts to advance peace and security in West Africa and the Sahel.